

Culture and Community

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Community is a network of people who come together for some common cause or celebrations. A community is not necessarily geographic, although geography can define certain communities. More to an understanding of community is to appreciate that community is real based on the relationships that form, not on the space. Indeed, space can be an abstract notion when it comes to understanding community. Think about the global community created by the Internet. These communities are not bound by geography, but are relationships forged in cyberspace.

The term culture is analogous to community, but culture relates more to the behaviors manifested by the community. People bound together around a common cause create a community, but the minute they begin to establish behaviors around their common cause they become a culture. Now my anthropological friends will take issue with this simplistic definition, but the purpose of this book is not to add to the anthropological literature but to offer cultural information to help promote change.

To the heart of the matter, this basic definition of community and culture blend two key features. One is the fact that community is a network of people. Often these people may have great differences or even distances between them. They can be very disparate in other ways, but the second feature, that of a common cause, is what pulls them together. The similarity of the common cause or celebration is the glue that creates the network. Regardless of who the members of the network are as people, their common cause overrides whatever difference they may have and creates a powerful connection. Then, as the collection of people begins to frame behaviors and patterns, they become a culture.

Think about the many communities you may be involved with. From your family, to your work team, to your church, to your clubs or associations, you find yourself around people who might be different from you in many ways, but the commonality of the community tends to over-ride the differences you have and create a strong norm for connections.

This blending of similarity of interest with natural diversity of the members creates unique phenomena for growth and development in both people and organizations. The drive to find, create or be more than we had before is magically transformed when it is blended with community.

Current business leaders understand this. Most successful companies and organizations understand the potency of community and work to create a community sense among their employees. In fact, thinking about any organization or workforce, including families, from the framework of community can lead to a greater sense of bonding, focus and success. Quite simply, community is a universal concept that not only creates advancement in products and ideas, but for people as well.

Cultures and communities have many features, but one key ingredient for a community is regularity. That is, for a community to be viable it must have some regular points of contact and connection. For a family community, this might be annual reunions, or the celebrations of holidays together. For a religious community, this would be weekly services and holy days for celebration. For clubs, groups or associations, the regular meetings or gatherings formalize the group as a community.

Other features of community include the notions of consent, creativity and cooperation. Robert Nisbit, (1972) suggested that community thrives on self-help and equal consent. He felt that people do not come together merely to be together, but to do something together that cannot be done in isolation. Others (Sussmen, 1959) identified community for its sense of interdependence. McKnight (1988) described community as a collective association driven toward a common goal.

Indeed, if we think about communities that we know, they all work toward some identified goal. From teaching people new skills, to saving souls, to addressing a common problem, to launching a government, all of these ventures capture the power of community, and then through their behavior, culture.

Functions of Community

Some researchers in community (Warren and Warren, 1979) have promoted community through an understanding of functions. Key functions of community are:

1. As a Sociability Arena – This is where members of the community are able to forge relationships and friendships through daily interaction. This sociability is driven by the proximity of the community members.
2. As an Interpersonal Influence Center – This function is where members of the community offer ideas and advice to fellow members especially in times of problems or struggles.
3. As Mutual Aid – Often in times of emergencies or extreme challenge, members of the community are available to each other for aid.

4. As an Organizational Base – This function is when most members of the community feel a kindred notion of commonality that leads to an organization or a unique banding together.
5. As a Reference Group – This function suggests and identification, often associated with pride, or some other unique bonding. This easily detected when members of the community introduce themselves with their commonality.
6. As a Status Arena – This final function allows members to gauge or parade their status through involvement with the community.

These functions offer a sense of purpose that the communities serve. Some or all of these 6 functions come into play when people gather around things they hold in common.

Elements of Community

In thinking about community a number of key elements can be identified. These elements are found in all types of community be they formal or informal. As we identify these aspects of community think about how they fit or relate to the communities you know.

Common Theme – All communities rally around a common theme. This common theme is the very essence of the community, the reason for its being. For families it is the lineage or heritage; the background of your ancestors. For workers, it is the mission, vision or agenda of the organization. For religions, it is the theology and belief structure of the congregation. For clubs and groups, it is the focus point for why the club gathers in the first place. For any gathering there is a reason. This is the common theme for the community.

In fact, the common theme is the deepest essence of the community. Consider the commonality found in these examples:

Family Culture – Perhaps the basic network of people bound by some common cause is the family. All of us start out life and learn the basics of culture through our family. Along with our nuclear family, many of us have the larger, extended family that includes all aspects of our genealogy. Most of us have a fair handle on our ancestry and nurture our understanding through photos, stories and family reunions. Some of you reading this may know about my own extended family up on “Condeluci Hill.” My family enclave consists of some 15 Condeluci families and we are reminded daily of the commonality of family.

Spiritual Culture – Most sustaining nations are anchored by strong spiritual cultures within their midst. A spiritual culture is a network of people bound together by a common theology. These cultures are usually organized as congregations, parishes, temples or other such venues of worship.

Work Culture – Another network of people bound by some common cause is a work community. Most of us, some time in our lives, serve as members of a company, organization or agency. In these roles, despite our differences in ethnicity, age, religion or experience, we are all similar as employees. Indeed, successful companies work hard to create a distinct “work culture” where members can enhance morale by being members of the team.

Age Culture – Another delineation that can bond people into a culture is age. In fact, with our educational system set up with age-specific groups, we are all habituated with our age peers. In the news we hear about the various age-oriented generations that have influence on our overall culture driven by age.

Neighborhood Culture – People who live in certain areas are often influenced by the common aspects and concerns of neighbors. People who live in close proximity are often concerned about appearance, crime, safety, children and other elements that bond us. Some neighborhoods develop safety patrols, escorts and other methods to make sure their fellow neighbors are not victimized. These types of neighborhood groups offer a classic example of a network of people bound by a common issue.

Ethnic Culture – Many people use ethnicity as a point of commonality. This bond is so powerful that regardless of any other factor, if you hold ethnic origins with another person, this commonality can lead to an instant identification. I know that in my own situation, as an Italian, many people will approach me at workshops or speeches I do and tell me that they too are Italian.

Sex or Sexual Orientation – With the advent of the women’s movement in the 60’s, we began to see the bonding of people based on their sex. Along with women’s groups, men’s collectives also began to develop to help men find the commonality of their experience. Beyond this are the gay and lesbian cultures. These groups help to offer broader implications of being gay.

Common Interest Culture – This catchall category refers to those networks of people who bond around some common interest. This could be people interested in photography, tennis, poetry, politics, darts, food, dogs or countless other avocations that people find in common. This list is virtually endless, but you can safely bet, that if there is something that you deeply love or enjoy, there is a commensurate group that gathers around that interest.

This notion of commonality is the root issue for the gathering of people and primary element of culture.

Membership – The people who gather to celebrate the theme are called members of the community. These are the individuals who show an interest or

passion for the reason around the gathering. Now membership can be either formal or informal, based upon the intent of the community. That is, for some official gatherings or settings that have a formal focus, members might have to buy their way in. An example here might be a health club or spa. The reason for gathering, or the theme, is physical fitness, but the members must apply and be accepted into the community. They might even need to have a membership card to prove you are a member of the community. Other communities are informal in nature and just a love for the theme is tantamount to membership. An example here might be folks who gather at the playground every day with their children. Regardless, people who join together forge this notion of membership.

Now just being interested in a theme is not tantamount to membership. One doesn't announce their interest in joining the community, but must have some invitation or entree to the culture. Membership is a sensitive issue.

A good way to get a handle on cultural membership is to think about the various communities that you belong to. This starts with family in which you are born to membership. Still, being a member of a family is a two-way street and some people may chose not to be associated with their family, but can never be fully or totally removed. Sometimes individuals disown their families and sometimes their families disown them. Even being disowned, however, does not totally remove you from your history with your family.

Membership in a spiritual culture is often a formal experience. In some cases a person may be born into a church or religion and expected to be raised by parents as such. In other cases, people may chose a religion or theology in which to participate and then petition or study their way into the group. Once membership is established, the person becomes a formal player. This would include envelopes for offerings, inclusion in the congregation yearbook, or named in the bulletin or weekly newsletter.

As a person becomes a youngster, they begin membership in a number of cultures. The first of these is formal educational venues, initiating with kindergarten or preschool and then moving into regular grade school. Membership in these settings is often driven by age and family financial income, or area of residence. Once the child gets registered and their family pays the fees or tuition, the child is considered an official member of the culture.

During the experience of grade and high school, children are introduced to a number of interest or ad vocational cultures. These include little league, dance school, music programs, soccer, basketball leagues, chess clubs, boys/girl scouts, YMCA Indian Princess, science clubs and on and on. Many of you reading this book know this experience all too well.

After High School, individuals consider membership into colleges, universities, trade schools, military or work cultures. These are all formal experiences that

require doing research and then considering which setting would be best for you. Once this choice is made the individual petitions to become a member, and may, or may not be accepted. With college, for example, if a person does not have the grades or SAT scores to merit admission, their petition for membership, no matter how sincere, would be rejected. Membership, be it formal or informal, is always a two way street.

As a young adult, there are other cultural venues, formal and informal, that are accessed. Groups, gangs, clubs, associations, hobbies that are actualized are all examples of the potency of community. As social animals, human beings want to belong or be considered a member. Even in an informal sense, the notion of membership and belonging are deeply embedded in our psyche.

The membership drive of belonging can best be understood in thinking about inclusion. In fact, inclusion is a word that is used in a number of paradigms. Elected officials talk often about the politics of inclusion. This is the notion that all people are welcome and needed in democracy. When people are included they belong to the political process.

The paradigm of human services also uses the concept of inclusion as a core ingredient. Here social service workers talk about including people with disabilities and differences into the mainstream of community. The entire notion of deinstitutionalization is driven by the goal of inclusion.

Inclusion is also a key element in civil rights. Discrimination is often seen as the opposite of inclusion. When people are discriminated against, they are not included into the mainstream of life.

In thinking about cultural membership and inclusion, we must have a full appreciation for what it means to belong. The best way to analyze this is to think about your own sense of inclusion in the cultures that you hold membership. I would imagine that everyone reading these words feel included in their cultures. In fact, I know it. The reason I know it, is that most of us (unless you are a glutton for punishment) do not stay in cultures where we do not feel welcomed.

Think about this. How many times have you been pulled to a party by a friend who was invited, only to realize when you get there that you do not know a soul. As you grope and bumble around the party you are really thinking about how you can leave. We don't like to stay in places where we are not accepted.

This happened to me recently when I was invited to a gathering by a friend. This fellow is always game to participate when I invite him, so I could not say no to his invitation. I wasn't excited, but I thought it would not be that bad. When we arrived at the gathering, my friend knew most of those in attendance and began to circulate amongst his friends. I followed him around, sheepishly, hanging on to elements of his conversation. I couldn't wait to leave.

Now understand, I am no retiring butterfly. I can mix it up with the best of them, but this setting was still awkward. I was uneasy and uncomfortable until it was time to leave.

As I continue to think about belonging and inclusion I am called to reflect on those things that are tied to the concept. What is it that signals inclusion? How do you know when you belong to a group or culture? What happens in those experiences when you really feel included?

For me inclusion and belonging boil down to 3 major themes. These are:

- Being Acknowledged – This is when people reach out to you and acknowledge you as a person. Being acknowledged is to be seen as having something to offer, to be relevant.
- Being Appreciated – Here is when we feel valued to the point that others care about what we bring to the community.
- Being Accepted – To be accepted is to become a part of the community in a formal way; to be a player.

Perhaps the most illuminating example of inclusion for me came about in a most unsuspecting way. I was off to make a presentation in the mid-west and found myself caught in a flight delay at the St. Louis Lambert Field. With plenty of time on my hands, and my reading material already devoured, I began roaming the airport to kill time. I happened upon the “Cheers” bar and decided to grab a bite. After my order was taken and I did a complete scan of the bar, I noticed that they were showing old reruns of the “Cheers” TV show on the monitors.

Now I have always been a fan of “Cheers.” Even now when I find an old episode on TV I cannot resist watching. In fact, in a way, the story line for “Cheers” fits well into the discussion of culture, community and inclusion. If you have never seen a “Cheers” episode (for those of you who have been doing the cave thing for the past 20 years) the storyline revolves around 6 very eccentric characters that resonate well in spite of their odd behaviors. Indeed, their strange behavior is what makes the stories interesting. All 6 characters are acknowledged, appreciated and accepted regardless of how weird they might be. This is true inclusion.

So I am watching these episodes in St. Louis and it hit me like a ton of bricks. All of these characters belonged. They were included just as they are. The culture worked. Then I focused on the theme song as each new episode was aired. Do you remember this theme song? If you do, you will recall that one of the lines is: “I want to be where everyone knows my name; and they are always glad I came” and then it hit me. This is the definition of belonging and inclusion – to be where people know our name and are glad we came.

Cultural membership is a two-way street where we feel acknowledged, appreciated and accepted. It is a dynamic experience that affects our feelings. You always know in your guts if you are included.

Rituals – Any time two or more people come together with any regularity around a theme of mutual interest, one of the first things that occur is the establishment of community rituals. A ritual is a deep-rooted behavior that the community holds as important. They are behaviors that have become so established in the culture that people hardly recognize them when they occur. But they do recognize when the behaviors drift away or ignore the rituals.

Every culture has a myriad of rituals that are unique to how the members celebrate their common theme. One easy way to begin to think about rituals is to consider your family. All of our families have rituals that define who we are. The rituals manifest all the time, but ones most evident revolve around holidays and family ceremonies. Religious holiday rituals present clear examples. In my family, Christmas Eve is full of deep rituals, from the formal dinner complete with various fishes and Italian delicacies, to the gift exchange, with my parents, now in their 80's, giving the last gifts to their children. Then off to Christmas Eve Services at Mother of Sorrows Church where we celebrate the Mass, complete with the Italian Carol, "El Tunde de La Stella." After Mass, we head up to the "Hill" and begin the house-to-house visits late into the evening.

Rituals can be formal or informal, but they are always important to the culture. Think about the rituals that play out at your work site. Each of us follows predictable rituals that define our culture. Add these individual rituals into the broader activities of the worksite create a clear culture.

One important element about rituals is that they are serious issues. Even if they seem silly or funny from afar, to the members of the culture they represent serious business. Members of the culture often put people who mock, or disregard the rituals in uncomfortable positions. I remember an experience that illustrates this point that happened a few years ago. I was in Minneapolis to do a presentation and I had an evening free. Being a big baseball fan, I decided to head into town to see the Twins play at the Metrodome. I arrived at the stadium and made my way to the cheap seats and waited for the game to begin.

Now baseball is a culture with deep and historic roots. You can predict many things and look forward to them being a part of the game. As I remember this night in Minneapolis, there was a smaller crowd, maybe 10,000 or so fans on hand and right before the game was to begin, a classic baseball ritual occurred. The announcer came on the PA system and said: "ladies and gentlemen, will you please rise for the national anthem; gentleman, take off your hats to honor America." At that point, 9,998 fans rose to participate in a baseball ritual. I notice that sitting a few rows behind me were 2 teenage boys, dressed in the

“grunge” look; baggie pants, oversize sweatshirts and ball caps, turned sideways. These fellows were still in their seats with feet propped on the row in front of them. They were talking and clearly ignoring the ritual until 2 big “cultural enforcers” walked over to them and suggested they stand up. The boys hesitated until on “enforcer” lifted them up. The boys quickly took off their caps and the 4 of them sang the National Anthem together.

Most of us remember the “Planet of the Apes” movies from the late 60’s and early 70’s. These movies presented a stark portrayal of rituals when the humans were observing the rituals of the apes. Some of them seemed bizarre, but in an odd way, the director might have been mocking human cultural rituals. As the heroes of the movie watched the apes do silly religious or patriotic rituals, it seemed to reflect on how strange some of our rituals might seem to alien cultures.

The critical message when thinking about rituals as a part of culture is their absolute importance. If you want to become a new member of a culture, or want to help someone else join a culture coming to know, appreciate and execute the cultural rituals is of the essence. The only way new people become valued in a culture is when they come to know and then practice the rituals.

Rituals are important because they soon become norms to a community and as the behaviors harden the culture becomes more and more influenced by them. Interestingly, the rituals or norms of a group or culture can be positive, negative or neutral in how they manifest on the cultures’ future. That is, some behaviors that become rituals that have a negative effect can lead to the demise of the culture. An example here might be with gangs. As the gangs develop rituals for their members that are negative or destructive, these behaviors can lead to a break-up of the gang. Conversely, if a culture hardens behaviors that are positive for the group, these rituals will work to strengthen and bond the community.

Beyond the impact on cultures or communities, individuals also develop rituals and norms that are hardened into routines. Think about your own routines. A good reflection might be your morning routines. If you are like most people you probably have a very structured routine where you follow deeply set rituals. Your morning coffee and paper, feeding the dog, or birds, walking around your house before you head off to work might all be examples of rituals. It really doesn’t matter how formal, or important, these rituals soon become important to you.

Rituals for groups or communities can often be categorized, or clustered. For example, countries have patriotic rituals that communities begin to honor. One example very relevant to me right now as I write these particular words is Memorial Day. Soon I will be setting this work aside to attend a Memorial Day Parade that my son Santino’s Little League Teams will be marching in. This ritual is done yearly to try to pass on the importance of patriotic sacrifice to our

children. Even though the kids seem more interested in the treats given after the parade, it seems that we are hoping that some of the symbolism of the event will rub off on them.

Religious rituals are equally interesting to observe. Various religious groups perform rituals that signal a direct or symbolic message about their religion. In the religion that I practice, one interesting ritual is the sign of the cross. Ever since I was a small boy, I remember making the sign of the cross as I entered church and at various times during the Mass. I didn't really know what it meant, but I did know that it was important and the more I did it like everyone else the easier it was to be a part of the community.

Communities and cultures also develop social rituals that become important. Years ago I was instrumental in creating a Volleyball League for Human Service professionals in Pittsburgh, PA. The HSVL (Human Service Volleyball League) as it was called became a very defined community. After its founding in 1974 with 10 teams the HSVL has grown to now having 30 teams defined in 3 divisions. The culture has ebbed and flowed over these past years, but one ritual that is still honored is the Wednesday night social gathering. Since 1974, Wednesday Nights have been the evening for socializing and getting to know the members better. This ritual started because we only played on Wednesday and after the games we would all go out for drinks. Today the league plays on various nights, but Wednesday is still the social night for the HSVL.

Much more could be said about rituals, but suffice it to say here is that rituals are important to understanding cultures and communities. If you are interested in joining or influencing a culture, knowing and honoring the rituals is an important first step.

Patterns – The patterns of a culture refer to the movements and territory of the members of the community. Make no mistake about it; human beings and the cultures we create are not only ritualistic, but highly territorial as well. In fact, in many ways we are not that far removed from our animal neighbors. Most animals mark their territory and humans are as much if not more territorial. Have you ever reflected on how you feel when someone sits at your desk, uninvited, and begins to use your phone or sort through your stuff? This sense of territoriality can cause us to become angry, or anxious.

In a larger context, the notion of territory has been the cause for rifts, skirmishes and wars. Nations have come to blows over territorial invasions or reaching over boundaries. I remember my first trip to Europe and the stark contrast from one border to another. On this same trip, when our tour bus came to a border, it was not uncommon for heavily armed guards to enter the bus and demand we show our passports. Territory is important to people and communities.

Patterns inspect the movements of cultural members and offer vital information on importance and prominence of the members. By observing how members move about a cultural gathering and relate to one another you can determine who is powerful and who is not. This type of observation becomes important when we are looking to identify gatekeepers and other critical cultural connectors.

Another important manifestation of patterning is how people continue to revolve around the territory they have come to know. A powerful example here is to think about your church, synagogue or temple. If you worship on a regular basis I am sure you have your own pew. I know for the Condeluci family this is true. We have come into the habit of attending 9:00 Mass every Sunday and unless there is some serious change in world affairs, you can place a bet on where we are going to sit. All the other parishioners understand this because they have their own pew as well.

The notion of patterning also takes cultural space into account as well. By cultural space I am referring to the direct distance between cultural members. Anthropologists have suggested there are 3 major space dimensions that play out with groups. These are:

- Public Space – With public space we are considering the formal distance that usually plays out when a cultural meeting is taking place. The people running the meeting, or the invited speaker position themselves somewhat apart from the members. Public space falls between 5 feet and more.
- Social Space – This dimension refers to the typical distances between cultural members when they are socializing or talking amongst themselves. This space is from 2 feet to 5 feet.
- Intimate Space – This final category relates to that close and intimate space that is reserved for covenant or licensed relationships. This is the space between lovers, or with people who have a license to get in that close, like doctors, or barbers. Intimate space ranges from touching to 1 foot.

Patterns also refer to the location that the culture meets or celebrates in. This location drives how the culture relates and the decisions that members make in relationship to space. Think about positioning decisions you make when you meet with your cultures in their typical meeting space. Then, reflect on how the patterning might change when the culture moves to a different venue. For example, when your spiritual community meets at church, synagogue or temple, you take your regular pew. But, if the congregation has a picnic or gathering in a different venue, this new location will have an impact on the patterning. This change can create a sense of discourse until the congregation settles in with the new location. What typically happens is that members who sit near each other in

church will gravitate toward each other at the picnic. People are creatures of habit and patterns offer a way to discover, that which is predictable.

Jargon – Jargon refers to the words the culture uses to discuss, debate or celebrate the common theme. The jargon of the culture is the specific, technical or focused words that make sense of the theme for which they gather. All cultures, informal or formal, establish words that only have meaning to them. These words can be slang, acronyms or pet words. The key is that they are meaningful to members of the culture.

Informal cultures like our families use a battery of words to describe people, events or things. Often these words (or phrases) have clear meaning to us, but seem silly or strange to others who may overhear us talk. Sometimes these words are ethnic, or symbolic, or reflective of some past experience or event. My family, for example, uses a number of Italian sayings or words that would seem alien to any outsider. In fact, not very long ago a friend from Toronto was visiting our agency and I invited him to a family gathering. As we sat down for dinner I realized he did not have a napkin at his place setting and called out to my wife to bring in a “mopine.” You should have seen the look on my friends face. He was sure that Liz would be bringing in a mop for him. The word “mopine” is an Italian word that means napkin or face cloth. We use it all the time in our family, but my Canadian friend had never heard it before, let alone in the context of my comments.

Communication theory looks at the notion of coding and decoding of messages as the heart of the communication process. By coding we are looking at how messages are constructed. When we code a message we are attempting to utilize words and delivery in a way that we think will enhance the possibilities that the person to receive the message will understand. A good communicator will try to better understand the sphere of experience of the person they are communicating with. The more one knows about their targets world, the easier coding will be. To this extent, jargon can come into play in communication theory. When I meet new people, if I find an area they are keen on, I might want to code some of my message with jargon that corresponds. This will probably enhance my message.

Another type of informal jargon are the hip or “in” words or phrases of the culture. These type of jargon may not facilitate the culture doing its work, but signal that the person is a member by using the “in” words. Popular and “in” words or phrases can come and go. In fact, magazines and newspapers will often identify the “in” and “out” words or phrases of the popular culture. Often these lists are published at the end of a year, helping members of the culture know what jargon to use in the New Year.

I often will rely on my children to help me come to know the new or hip words of the culture. Usually, however, when I begin to apply the words my kids will laugh and make fun of me. Here, we find an interesting issue related to jargon, and that is related to utilization of the words. Many times a newcomer to the culture might use the wrong word, or apply the word inappropriately. When this happens, the newcomer can be held at bay by the culture as an imposter. This can lead to exclusion. My failed use of the hip words applied by my children signals me as an imposter to that culture and stand out.

More formal cultures use words that are technical or focused on their work or business. These words or phrases can be descriptive or explanative and the sooner people in the culture know them the easier it is for them to do the work of the culture. In many companies, new staff members are given a glossary of words to help them navigate in communications.

Good examples here are the new words ushered in by the high technology information society. First used by players in the world of computers and software, words like gigabyte, hard drive, ram, internet, server, modem and the like are now being more popularly applied as computers become more accessible. These words, though first a part of a formal culture, may now be found in other domains as well. Such jargon begins to transcend their parochial culture to be applied across the board.

Regardless of the formal or informal notions of the culture, the jargon is critical for members of the culture to do their work. To understand and then apply the jargon is a key ingredient to cultural shifting.

Memory – Another dimension of any culture or community is the notion of memory. Simply applied, memory refers to the history and legacy of the community or culture. Memory captures and retains key elements of the past that get passed on to current members to help them maintain and retain the elements of the culture. To this extent the memory can revolve around any of the aspects reviewed in this section. That is, memory can include stories, photos or folklore of the common theme, members, rituals, patterns or jargon of the culture.

The capturing of a cultures memory can be formally or informally addressed. For example, formal cultures keep track of their past through things like yearbooks, annual reports, newsletters, bulletins, and the like. These official publications do honor to the past and help keep current members committed. Through their stories and photos these agents of memory serve as glue for the culture.

In fact, the most powerful aspect of memory is found with photos, stories or folklore, regardless of whether they are formal or informal. Think about your family if you want to better understand the potency of photos and stories to memory. For my family, the photos that have captured any of our history are

deeply revered. We have created scrapbooks of all the children's birth, and each critical step stone. Add to this the vacations and events and you have a flood of photos that create a deep and intense memory for all of us in the family.

This notion of scrapbooks needs more discussion. Not long ago I was invited to make a presentation in Dover DE. I was happy to do this because it gave me a reason to visit with my cousins who live in Newcastle DE. During my brief stay I had an opportunity to catch up with my cousins and their family and came to discover that Kathy was taking a scrapbook class. She was learning how to not only keep photos of her family, but to enhance their impact by adding images and colors to accelerate the impact of the photos. These scrapbooks offer an exciting point of memory for her family for their future.

Stories too, are key elements of memory to a culture. Every culture has its stories and folklore that relate to its past. These types of memory continue to underscore the viability of the culture. I know at my agency, every time we have a gathering, the stories from the past flow. People reflect on things they did, others who came before them, people who had an impact on the culture.

These stories are critical because they not only pay homage to the past, but also give the current members something to strive for within the culture. That is, as the current members relive past events they set the bar for behaviors that might elevate them to a status of being a part of a future story. If the culture remembers you, your importance in the culture is established. In a way, stories cement the past and set a promise for the future. They are an important part of any culture.

Gatekeepers – In any discussion of culture or community, especially one that examines change, the most critical ingredient is the gatekeeper. The gatekeeper is defined as an indigenous member of the culture who has some power or influence within the culture. By indigenous we mean that the person is already included and accepted in the culture. By powerful, we mean that the person has either official (elected or selected) leadership, or is unofficially (endorsed by colleagues) influential in the culture. Either way, the gatekeeper has authority with the members.

Now gatekeepers can be either positive or negative in how they see new people, products or ideas. The positive gatekeeper is accepting and open, willing to take risks. Conversely, the negative gatekeeper is closed and rejecting of new things. To this extent the positive gatekeeper opens the culture to new things and the negative gatekeeper attempts to protect the culture and promotes the status quo.

In some way, this positive and negative spread can follow a typical flow of the positive and negative members of any community. Psychologists (Hammersmith) suggest that we might consider this idea of the gatekeeper falling

into a classic bell shaped curve with membership. This bell shaped curve identifies about 20% of the population having the propensity to be positive gatekeepers, with another 20% falling into the negative gatekeeper category. The remaining 60% of the culture are neutral and could be swayed either way, depending on the influence and energy of the dominant gatekeeper.

The reason gatekeepers are critical to culture is that they use their power to endorse or reject a new idea, person, or product to the culture. A good example of how this works is to think about political endorsements. When a candidate develops publicity for the campaign they often will solicit a celebrity or well-known individual to endorse them, or to speak against their opponent. In this process, the gatekeeper attempts to promote their candidate and helps reject the opponent.

Madison Avenue understands the potency of the gatekeeper. Whenever a company decides to introduce a new product to the culture, they use the power of advertising to promote their product. The most critical phase is the initial penetration of the product into the culture. Although advertising firms are creative in this process, one of the most time-tested methods is to have the product introduced by a celebrity or influential person. As the celebrity pitches the product, the members of the community who are exposed to the advertising are often drawn first to the celebrity and then to the product. Indeed, some products become so associated with celebrities that they put their names on the product. Basketball shoes are a perfect example here. It seems that every big name professional player has his or her own shoes on the market. Of course, the mark up on these endorsed products is great. I know this all too well, because I have 2 sons who want to “be like Mike” by having Michael Jordan sneakers.

If you begin to look closer at this phenomenon of the celebrity spokesperson as the gatekeeper for a new idea, the approach is fascinating. A key to success, however, is that the gatekeeper must continue to keep their positive appeal in the culture. A good example of the twists and turns that can happen is with O. J. Simpson. Not long ago, O. J. Simpson was the darling of the advertising world. He had everything companies wanted – he was handsome, well off, an excellent athlete who had made the transition to actor, and was a family man as well. O. J. was everywhere; on TV, billboards, magazines and other media outlets. Then came the murders in Bellaire and all of this came to a screeching halt. Even though a jury of his peers acquitted O. J. Simpson of the murder, he is a persona-non-grata in the advertising world today. His gatekeeper image was indelibly tarnished.

We can see examples of gatekeepers in all walks of life. One interesting lens is in the religious ceremony of baptism. In a baptism, a newcomer to the religion is formally welcomed into the congregation. Using a symbolic ceremony, the person is anointed and then formally announced to the congregation. Standing

by the person being baptized is their sponsor, or Godparent. The other members of the congregation usually know this gatekeeper. When they stand with and for the newcomer, they essentially transfer their value to the newcomer. This transition of values is a powerful signal. The congregation knows and values the Godparents and Minister. As these valued gatekeepers stand with the newcomer, the value of the newcomer goes up in the eyes of the congregation. Not that the newcomer is fully embraced, but at least they get a ledge-hold in the new culture.

As I think about this symbolic endorsement of a newcomer, I am drawn to a scene in the Disney movie, "The Lion King." When Simba is born, it is the highly valued Rafeiki who lifts Simba up to all of the animal kingdom to announce his arrival. This is a type of baptism.

Think now about the many gatekeepers you have had in your life as you have made your way into community. The clubs you have joined, or times you moved to a new place, or taken a new job, or the first time you went to a gathering of your husband or wives families. No matter where or when, a gatekeeper played a role in helping you get into the group. If this didn't happen, then you left or bailed out. Quite simply, we do not get into cultures without the assistance of a gatekeeper.

Gatekeepers, especially positive gatekeepers, are critical to culture, because they help bring new things into the community. When they do this, the new idea, person or product introduced by the gatekeeper adds, or causes the existing members of the culture to redefine him or herself. This addition and redefinition of culture is what leads to cultural growth.

Anthropologists have understood this phenomenon. They know that homogeneity, or similarity of members of culture creates a sense of comfort and security for the group. Everyone has the same things to resonate around and embrace. Heterogeneity, or the convergence of differences, however, pushes the culture to growth. Quite simply, difference causes us to grow.

In his book The Tipping Point, (2000) Malcolm Gladwell reflects on the kinds of people necessary to move something from one level to another. The movement from fad to mainstream use has a tipping point. Gladwell looked to understand this key element of transfer. In his work he looks at 3 types of people who move ideas, people or products into the mainstream. He calls these folks "connectors, mavens and salesman."

- The "connectors" are the people with broad circles and can influence a lot of these people.
- The "mavens" are people who have a deep level of information and are always looking to share this information with others.
- The "salesmen" are passionate purveyors of ideas, products or people.

To me, a gatekeeper is a person with one, two or all three of these qualities. They are the key to cultural shifting by promoting things push the community to a new level.

Other efforts have been made to examine what type of people lead to social change and cultural shifting. Some of the things we know about positive gatekeepers are:

- They tend to be positive people. They genuinely like people and look for the good in everyone they meet.
- They are social risk-takers. They reach out to the underdog and are willing to take cultural flack if need be.
- They reach out to new things, are curious and interested in why, how and why not.
- They tend to be younger people not so caught up in dogma.
- More often than not they tend to be women. Men are usually more conservative and become more easily set in their ways.
- They are highly social and tend to be good mixers.
- They tend to have respected influence with their community.

Now to understand these notions of community are one thing, but to take advantage and leverage them is quite another. If we know that the gatekeeper is an essential ingredient to cultural shifting, how can we come to find them, or more importantly, to become one. This is no easy task, but there clearly are things we can learn, and attempt to adopt.

These notions about culture and community are essential if we are going to consider the macroscopic elements to change. The more we come to understand how community inclusion and acceptance happens, the easier it will become in our efforts to build a community where each belongs.