

4 Elements to Creating a “Sense of Community” by Dr. David McMillan



by Shannon Byrne on 06.02.2014

Not many speakers can make an entrance like community legend [Dr. David McMillan](#) makes an entrance. As every good presentation starts with a story, Dr. McMillan did not disappoint with his childhood tale of him and his buddies stealing a PlayBoy magazine from the local store and running off to each other to well, you get the drift. As he pointed out, it was really a story of a “social community.” So what makes a group of people more than just a group of people — what creates a sense of community?

Dr. McMillan has been working on his “Sense of Community Theory” for more than 30 years. (Proof that community is not just a new marketing trend or fad!) During his presentation, he walked us through the four psychological elements that create a sense of community. Because, after all, it’s about science.



1. Membership (spirit/religion)

Membership has four sub-elements that further tap our psyche:

- Boundaries
- Emotional safety
- Sense of belonging
- Personal investment/dues paying to belong

David Spinks has [walked us through these four particular elements](#) on the CMGR before! Dr. McMillan really expressed how the belief that you’ll be welcomed (the expectation of belonging // feeling of acceptance) plays a big role in why we join communities.

2. Influence (trust/government)

At the core of developing influence is building trust — people must know what they can expect from each other in the community. Community norms are essential to establish that trust, creating conforming behavior. For example, when you go to a party, once someone starts dancing, you can dance, then suddenly everyone is dancing. Similarly, once trust is created, it continues to build and build. And as more trust is created, more wealth is built, as Dr. McMillan explained.

3. Reinforcement integration of fulfillment needs (trades/economy)

To build a successful social community, you need to bring something of value (connections, resources, etc). If you don’t, you won’t be there long. If the community doesn’t offer value, it won’t last. Communities need to have something you want, and they need to want you. Dr. McMillan made sure to note that a community won’t have value if its members don’t have differences. We’re creating value when we’re the sum of all of our parts.

4. Shared emotional connections

For an emotional connection, something has to happen to form a common bond. Members must share time (a dramatic event must occur), and that time must be high-quality. A very powerful exchange happens when people form a common bond around something – an interest, an event experienced together, etc. The more quality time spent among a community, the stronger the emotional connections are going to be built.

THE COMMUNITY MANAGER

<https://thecommunitymanager.com>



Dr. McMillan’s parting words of wisdom were ones to remember:

“Go home and tell someone something a little too much. Take a risk. Maybe they will tell you something. If they do, take, catch it, hold it. Tell them that they belong to you, that you’re going to reserve a special place just for them. Tell them that they matter. Being connected doesn’t mean you have to sacrifice, you sacrifice because you care. The more expectations you create, the better you’ll dance with them. Give something of value and accept something you don’t have that’s of value to you. Learn, teach, grow, and prepare them for the day that you’re not going to be there. Then tell the story about the people you love. Create rituals, symbols, and traditions then tell them your ability to build a community has grown.”



Photos by Danielle Siembieda. See more of her work on [siembieda.com](#)

Shannon Byrne

Shannon is the Content Manager + Community Associate at Loyal (<http://loyal.is/>), a community development studio, where she crafts words and creates community-driven strategies for Loyal and its clients. Florida native turned Brooklynite, she has a passion for writing and a knack for connecting people. Follow her on Twitter @ShannonB.