BETTER
How to build creative communities that transform the world
Nick Smoot

Contents

Chapter 1
It is time...

- 77% of youth do not qualify for military service due to obesity, drug use, and mental health[1].

- 70% of Americans feel financially stressed and 63% of American adults can not cover a $500 emergency[2].

- 58% of Americans experience measurable loneliness which carries the same impacts as smoking a pack of cigarettes per day; a 50% increase in dementia and 60% increase in premature death[3].

- 51% of the global population will be defined as obese by 2035; costing the economy over $4 trillion per year[4].

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1. U.S. Department of Defense, Office of People Analytics (2022). 2020 Qualified Military Available (QMA) study.

2. CNBC and Momentive, Your Money Financial Confidence Survey (March 2023).

3. The US Surgeon General's Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community, Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation (2023)

4. World Obesity Foundation, World Obesity Atlas 2023 (March 2023)

- 85% of employed workers are not engaged at work costing the global economy $7.8 trillion per year in lost productivity. An additional $1.2 trillion was spent in the U.S. on welfare in 2022[5].

- Depression is considered the leading cause of disability globally[5].

- 80% of Americans do not trust the government to do the right thing. Citizen anger about economic problems, especially surging inflation, drove anti government protests to a record high in 2022. [7] [8]

- 57% of Gen Z see being an influencer as their top job choice. [9]

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5. Pendell, Ryan. "The World's $7.8 Trillion Workplace Problem." Www.Gallup.Com, 14 Jun. 2022, www.gallup.com/workplace /393497/world-trillion-workplace-problem.aspx.

5. "Depression." World Health Organization, www.who.int/heal th-topics/depression#tab=tab_1.

7. https://carnegieendowment.org/2022/12/08/economic-anger -dominated-global-protests-in-2022-pub-88587

8. https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2022/06/06/americans -views-of-government-decades-of-distrust-enduring-support-for -its-role/

9. Gen Z's main career aspiration is to be an influencer, https://www.entrepreneur.com/business-news/what-is -gen-zs-no-1-career-choice-social-media-influencer/459387

We can and must do BETTER. We need a revolution in culture that moves humanity back to its birthright of being a creator and not a consumer. Consumerism has eroded far too much of our lives and lifestyles.

It is destroying the majority of humanity... truly the majority!

Humans are not flourishing and it is flat out due to how we have allowed culture to shift away from positive social infrastructure that helps us **AND** expects us to set goals, learn skills, and gather to celebrate and support progress as a community participating in a greater shared mission!

As you read through this book, do it with a clear and open mind, ready to learn new ways of building a BETTER world. Maybe, just maybe, there is a BETTER way than what we are currently doing and seeing all around us. In the last 10 years we have run a wild and memorable experiment to do our part to help build a BETTER world. In the last decade, we have collaborated with and worked alongside all sorts of people that range from the typical folks you think about when you ponder who 'runs the world'—Prime Ministers, Senators, Governors, Mayors, Billionaire Philanthropists, Economists, University Presidents, Principals, Real Estate Developers, and publicly traded companies while in parallel, we were in meetings, conversations, and strategy sessions with employees of large companies who feel stuck, families living in shelters, students confused about the future, leaders of non-profits, single moms, the homeless, disabled people, janitors, and senior citizens.

You know what they all have in common? They want a BETTER tomorrow! And you know what, we are convinced we have something special to get us there —a modern and relevant approach to human and economic performance.

As we continue, I want to emphasize that we believe this journey towards the BETTER tomorrow starts with the establishment of a concept that we have pioneered called "Flourishing Plans." It is a simple framework and strategy to help people of all types design a life around setting goals, learning skills in service of the goals, and hosting and attending incredible events that all support this project-based way of living. The design of flourishing plans can become more complex as you apply it to city-wide economies, a real estate developments, or corporations, which we will get into later, but the principles stay the same— help people set goals, learn skills, and attend events all in service of a journey toward individual and shared goals.

This human centered social and economic framework serves as a cornerstone for both nurturing human creativity and re-aligning the needs of people with the needs of a growing city. As we watch both cities and people struggle, it is hard to not believe that things have gotten out of whack. More often than not human and economic needs feel like they are at war with each other. This results in people hating the government, real estate developers, and corporations because "the Man" is not paying attention to the needs of the people. Well, maybe instead of blaming the Man and hoping "he" fixes it, we should ask if we can build our own and BETTER way of "humaning". One that brings harmony and balance to world; finding common ground between "the Man" and the huMan. A path that doesn't require permission to get going. You see, I believe in a world where the masses design a better way to invest in themselves as a community, align with unique local and global industry trends, and develop a grassroots movement of human-first economics... also know as Flourishing Plans.

We can build a world where social time is used to work collaboratively to unlock the potential of individuals and gather to craft a future we all aspire to, enabling us to discover genuine fulfillment through

strengthened community bonds and the promise of a more prosper-
ous future. This is the power of Flourishing Plans; this simple and
seemingly insignificant concept, when integrated with the tools in
this book, possess the magical ability to heal individuals, rejuvenate
whole cities, and unleash incredible economies—a path to honoring
human capital with the same rigor and professionalism that is placed
on growing GDP.

We desperately need that in our world!

*Image of Jim Young Kim the CEO of World Bank, Rajiv Shah the
CEO of the Rockefeller Foundation, Tanisha Carino of Faster Cures,
and Michael Milken.*

When a community's social fabric becomes a shared beacon of hope
and bottom-up economic progress that showcases the aspirations,
dreams, and hard work of its members, it awakens something deep
inside that reminds us all of our birthright as creators.

It prompts us to reject mindless consumerism and embrace our roles with purpose, passion, and pride.

This approach not only unleashes key drivers of a strong economy, but also establishes social gatherings centered around goals. And here is the sneaky part—it fosters an inclusive perspective that honors and recognizes the worth of others different from you and transcends oversimplified 'identifiers' such as race, religion, political party, sexual preference, economic status, gender, and other divisive categories. Keep in mind that the most damaging thing you and I could do is to restrict our view of the world by shoving people into useless boxes, or even worse—acting and living in such a way that helps the world believe that the boxes are truly their identity.

By taking a bold move to place relationships built on goals and growth at the center of our world, we **destroy the "box".** We choose to lean in with curiosity, see the potential in others, celebrate progress, learn from each other, and begin to design a merit based world with clearer and simplified on ramps to a bright future. When we invest our time in building goal-based creative communities like this, we honor the creator in and around all of us. We unleash and acknowledge a unifying force of beauty and value in the world by looking at the hopes and dreams of others, but we don't stop there; we do the work to humbly grow together because we need each other to achieve our big goals.

Each of us and our nations urgently needs this change, and with this book and the tools we provide, you possess everything required to initiate a grassroots revolution in human flourishing that transforms your life and the lives of people around you. It's more achievable than you might imagine. **It is time to do something about this longing in your bones—dig in, embrace your passions, chase the bigger dream, do the work, and lead the way to a brighter,**

more humane world that heals the civic, mental, physical, and economic issues destabilizing our world.

For a moment imagine the community you call home as being a place where everyone, and I mean everyone, can and does set crystal clear goals of who they want to become and what they want to create. Goals that each person is 100% convinced will add more beauty and value to the world. The kind of goals that you write on a mirror—the ones that haunt you in a good way like Casper the friendly ghost.

This community has been thoughtfully and intentionally designed in such a way that each resident has the tools and connections that give them quick access to learn the skills they need to accomplish their goals. The residents actively help neighbors accomplish goals and learn skills because it is life-giving and fun and... they truly know that doing the work is worth it... this is a BETTER way of life.

In this community there are large, open to the public, parties and events designed to provide inspiration, education, accountability, and celebration of the progress everyone is making in pursuit of these incredible goals. These events are awesome! Not some boring and dry gathering, but experiences where you make memories and true friends.

It is normal to mentor someone in this community.

It is normal for the kids to have clear and big goals.

It is normal for the government to look for ways to support these positive grassroots movements.

That is what this book is about, helping you build that place! A place where humans and economies flourish together! A place filled with

people living with purpose and passion while doing the work that brings true feelings of pride.

This book is your "pocket guide" to understanding the principles we believe in and to guide you in designing and implementing a community and culture that unlocks a social and economic infrastructure, enabling people and places to flourish. Every community on Earth can benefit from a shared global framework on how to "human" better. We need a shared story, vision, and process that we can all pursue together — one that gives us a sense of unity and a shared belief and process to see the good in each other.

However, to be clear, a successful implementation of a Flourishing Plan will appear unique and different in every place because... EVERY PLACE IS UNIQUE AND DIFFERENT!!! While events might be similar, and the rhythm of why and how we gather might feel the same, the stories, people, and industry focus of the gatherings will be different. We will delve into this more later in the book. For now, though, understand that the last thing we want to see is a slew of clone communities attempting to emulate the next "cool" city.

How did that work out for all those cities wanting to be like San Francisco... and, let's be honest, we don't need every city to be just like the others. The idea of everyone being "coders" was a bad one. The concept of every government aiming to develop a "life sciences cluster" is also misguided. Capitalism has evolved, and it is time we change how we unleash a BETTER future of work, live, play, learn, and create — a model and approach that honors the unique superpowers of a local place and its people while leveraging the best parts and realities of modern capitalism.

In the chapters ahead, we will share with you the programs and systems we have developed and teach you the best practices we have

learned in the trenches. The principles we teach will help you, your friends, and your community take back control of your lives and communities. It is time to utilize your time to unleash creativity, forge deeper friendships, and engage in the hard and worthwhile work of creating valuable and beautiful things with your neighbors. It is time we boldly take a stand and stop wasting our lives playing video games, scrolling aimlessly on social media, getting lost in another youtube rabbit hole, watching more of CNN to see how bad the world is, or bar-hopping night after night in hopes to stumble into some form of "joy".

It is possible to build a society where our lives are are spent creating products, art, software, and hardware; creative communities building the future. It is possible, and damnit I expect you to take a pledge to flourish instead of flounder.

To become better.

To be more.

To add beauty and value to the world.

Join us on a journey to discover, dream, design, and deliver stronger communities and economies.

You will notice that much of this book is about building creative communities to build valuable skills, companies, and inventions. This approach is important because we are aiming to harmonize the human condition with the global drum beat and cadence used to grow economies. We take this approach because it has the power to align government and corporate investment, trillions of dollars, directly back into people, our greatest asset.

With that said, do not be fooled... this isn't just about businesses, innovation, hustle, or economics, it is a sneaky plan to redesign culture to help everyone come fully alive and achieve a flourishing human race!

If you take this book seriously and start implementing the simple steps we suggest, it will only take you 4-6 hours per week to start a movement that unleashes the best in you and your community. That may be the same amount of time you spend hitting the snooze button each week, it might be the same amount of time you spend watching your favorite TV show, or even worse... it could be the same amount of time you spend thinking about ways you could change the world, only to find yourself daydreaming and not daydoing.

All that to say, you got this; it is time to act, and we're right here to run alongside you in this crazy world that often feels like a dumpster fire. I believe this book will serve as a beacon of hope and here are three reasons why:

1. This book will provide you with a new mental framework to shift your focus and take action. It is fun to debate politics, war, aliens, religion, and who actually killed Epstein, but instead let's focus on the things in our own backyards that matter and that we can control.

2. This book will provide you with a new and simple theory of change for the strategic and structured approach to modern social and economic development.

3. This book will provide you with a community of like minded world changers and a ton of tools to help you build the brighter tomorrow.

With that said, it is time... let's go!

Chapter 2

The Eyes I've Earned

I am like you.

I want better.

I want more.

For the past 25 years, I've been on a wild ride, experimenting and cooking up a BETTER world. It's a tale of how I transformed into a relentless optimist, diving headfirst into the realms of poverty, wealth, creativity, culture, history, psychology, economics, the Industrial Revolution, capitalism, loneliness, hope, religion, deaths of despair, happiness, welfare, virtue, government, game theory, mentorship, money, and morality.

Buckle up for the adventure!

It has led me to places on this earth and to take actions I could have never have dreamed of as a little boy. The stories I'm about to share with you in this chapter might seem like an odd or random thing to weave into this book, but these are a few of the key moments that have helped shape my heart and mind. I am not highlighting these in an attempt to impress you, but instead in an effort to help you understand the unique eyes I have earned and to learn why I see the world the way I do. I am deeply grateful to each person who has added

perspectives and value to my life. I'm equally grateful for the battle scars and dirt under my fingernails that has made me into me. My life has been more interesting than I ever expected and I look forward to new stories, hopefully including you and the communities we impact together.

The Early Years

As far back as I can remember, I was immersed in a world of what we might call "underdogs". I grew up in a lower middle-class family and in my family it was a priority to serve others. This mostly came from my mother's staunch Hispanic and Catholic childhood. Part of her youth was spent in Puerto Rico, where my Grandmother was born and my mother was immersed in the culture. In this culture, you do your part to be someone who adds value and looks out for your neighbors along the way. This heritage of working hard, taking care of neighbors, and always finding time and money to serve others with bled into her parenting. In the mid 1980's, before I even entered kindergarten, my mother had me serving as a peer role model in group play settings with down syndrome and autistic children at a local non-profit program. I only knew them as my friends. This exposure and environment provided me with a mental framework and gave me eyes to look beyond the cultural beliefs of someone who is "different". It taught me to see how we are similar, how we all have a role to play in adding value to the world, and how all of us showing up and learning to be our best, regardless of ability, is a shared obligation.

This education continued in the early 90's as I was offered a role to work in a summer camp designed to provide a positive environment and mentorship for children who were the custody of the state. As a

middle schooler, I found myself struggling to understand how five year olds didn't have a family and that the government was their "parent". I specifically remember one young man I had to run after and stop from running into a busy street. He just wanted to run away from everything. This moment shocked, disturbed, and hurt as I was filled with complex thoughts. It appeared to me that he hated his life so much that he was willing to risk dying in traffic and try to live on his own to escape the system he was in. Did he hate me? Should I let him run? What is so bad about the system? Could my family help more?

After I stopped him, we sat as he cried. A while later, he shared his confused thoughts and frustrations with me. Over that summer, we became friends as I learned more about the realities of the world. I hoped for something BETTER.

Adventures And My 20's

In high school, this thread of a BETTER world and doing my part continued. It blended into a version of me in my late teens and early twenties that used my heart and mind to create a leadership program for youth. It provided them with opportunities to work alongside the poor in collapsed North American industrial towns and in developing nations across the world.

I will never forget standing there at 21 years of age in Arusha, Tanzania working with a local non-profit and community leaders, as we worked to put a new roof on the mud hut that an incredible grandmother and her grandchildren lived in. All of her children had died of the AIDS epidemic, and she was the only person left to take care of her 16 grandchildren. During the day, she collected firewood to sell as a way to support the family she loved and watched over. I will never

forget her and the tired face and strong arms she had built toiling for the people she loves.

During my time in Tanzania, I encountered a vendor at the local market who specialized in selling rope and various metals. Intrigued, I approached him and asked if he could source metal to create bracelets for the 73 high school students and mentors accompanying me on the trip. We developed a routine of talking most days when I visited the market.

As my stay in Moshi neared its end, the vendor surprised me with an unexpected proposition; his granddaughter's hand in marriage. He suggested that by me taking her to America, she might have a chance at a better future. My heart sank as I realized his intentions were driven by a deep desire for something more for his family, a hope he held onto despite the challenges. Giving his granddaughter to someone he barely knew seemed to him a potential path to a better tomorrow.

This encounter left a lasting impact on me, fueling my obsession with creating a better world for individuals like him and his family. So many people are desperate for something better and willing to go to great and terrifying lengths to secure a glimmer of hope for their loved ones.

A local nonprofit leader and I evaluating a weak wall of a construction project in Tanzania.
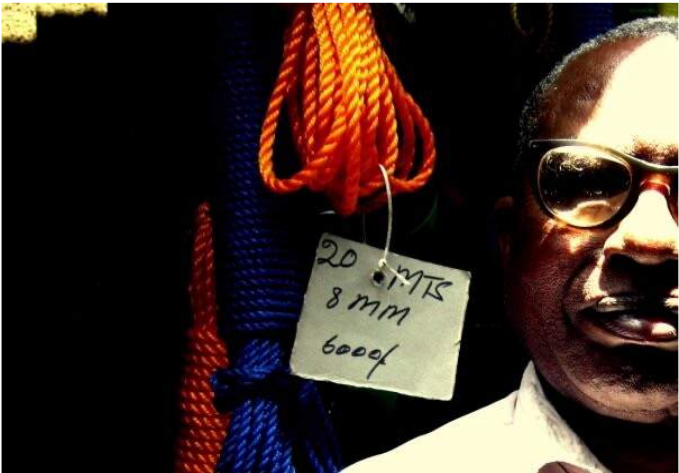

Image I took at the market of the man who sold me the bracelets and offered me his granddaughter as a wife so she could get to America.

A few of the children at the orphanage in Moshi, Tanzania.

I continued to run programs for youth that provided leadership development experiences to bridge the cushy life of most teens with the harsh realities of the world we inhabit. During this time, the show "Extreme Home Makeover" was a huge hit, and a group of us came up with a wild idea of remodeling a home in a week for someone who truly deserved it. We reached out to a few local agencies that worked with elderly citizens living below the poverty line, and they identified one woman living without plumbing who was also mentally disabled. After learning more about her, we realized that if anyone deserved a complete home remodel, it was this woman.

You see, bored and misguided kids in this town often left behind broken windows and graffiti—things that tend to happen when people

lack purpose, passion, mentorship, and can't see a path to a hopeful future. In this specific instance, local kids sought ways to torment this older woman, and someone actually killed the woman's cat, hanging it above her door as a cruel joke. I can only assume it was the same children looking for a thrill, and in their stupidity, they shattered a woman's happiness and murdered her friend. I am haunted by that story and the pain of that woman. Remodeling her home brought a smile to her face, but the deep feeling that we need a better way for our world was continuing to grow.

These programs expanded in reach, creativity, and impact. Soon, I found myself designing and leading events with thousands of youth participating in them. Underpinning these events was a system to help teens **discover** what is happening in the world that matters, guide them in **dreaming** about a goal based on their discoveries, help them **design** a plan to achieve that goal, and then provide programs to support them in following the set plan to **deliver** on their goal. This leadership training program became a catalyst for change, leading me to meetings with statewide officials in education and juvenile justice programs.

One of the high school students from North America learning how to carry water like locals do.

A few of the high school boys and I after a late night soccer game against the local team in Peru.

Late 20's And The Pivot To Business

As I dove headlong into doing my best to create positive change in the world with innovative ideas and systems that shift culture toward something BETTER, a few businessmen with children going through these programs introduced me to the idea that I could apply the same creativity and systems thinking to the business world to create impact and profit.

Intrigued and a bit confused, I asked more questions about what they saw in me that would apply to the business world. After they explained that if I could design and run a trip to Africa with 70+ high school kids that I could absolutely handle business.

After a few more conversations, I found myself taking a role consulting for these investors. A few of the companies that they had invested in weren't performing as well as they had hoped. Even after they had tried all sorts of solutions they still couldn't get them back on track. Their thought was to cut me loose to learn about each business and then propose solutions I wanted to try. Since I had no formal business training and never completed College, this approach gave me freedom to creatively experiment with nontraditional ways of solving business problems. Quickly, I understood a different side of the world that I had ignored, and I started hiring, firing, running unique marketing and sales campaigns, and even taking on legal battles with local governments. After some wins and losses, I was successful at leading the exit of one of their companies for more than they had even hoped for. I quickly established myself as a successful turnaround management consultant who took a "different approach."

This newfound world of business intrigued me. I spent time reading books, making connections, and testing more of my ideas. Soon this led me to launch my first startup with one of the investors, and I found myself in a new role as a co-founder of the company that was the first to put the entire body of Psychology on the internet to provide more access and better service to psychology students.

On this journey of my first startup, I met the famous Psychologist BJ Fogg who is the founder of the Stanford Behavior Lab and author of Tiny Habits. I was fortunate to work alongside Dr. Steven Hinshaw, the previous chair of the Psychology Department of UC Berkeley and former editor of the most quoted professional journal in the field. As I was working with these world-class psychologists, I also had my first interactions with "the man," The ASPPB, The Association of State and Provincial Psychology Boards. "The Man" is the licensing body that provided many psychologists with their licenses and produced and protected the test all licensed psychologists had to pass. After getting to know some of the folks at ASPPB, I decided I wanted to hire one of their directors to come work for us. After getting to know each other a bit more, I had the good fortune of being able to hire her away from them to come work with our startup.

This landed me in the industry hot seat because... "you don't do that!". Quickly, I found a gift I had for ruffling the feathers of "normal." I was even told by internal team members that none of the ASPPB staff were allowed to speak with me anymore.

Long story short, after years of hard work and breaking the rules of "normal," this company became the #1 test prep company in North America for licensed psychologists, and even today, it is the leading provider of EPPP exam preparation. One of the key things that set our company apart from the others was our approach to leveraging technology as a tool to help psychologists better prepare for exams

and to access content. I had always been interested in the power of mobile phones to become a tool to make our lives better and had even worked for a cell phone distributor in the 90's just to have access to the newest technology. My belief that phones would become the "remote control" for our lives became a central thesis in my startup work. In this first startup, we provided mobile-friendly online access. Our ads even promoted the idea that you could review "flashcards" on your phone back in 2009. As I watched technology act as a differentiator for us, I became increasingly fascinated with how tech could assist humans in the pursuit of our goals.

I went on to launch two other mobile tech startups. One was the first to use QR codes in the real estate industry on signs to provide mobile-first residential home websites, and the second was in partnership with Richard Branson's Virgin America, as we became the first in the world to launch a social network at 35,000 feet. Each time I launched a company, I would look for ways to not only create a better product that was easier to use, better priced, and fun, but I also wanted to make sure the product served the target audience in a more authentic way. Typically, I found myself going against the grain of the industry because I didn't know there was a "right way" to do things; I looked for the BETTER way.

I had a bit of an obsession with using technology—mobile devices at the time—to try and improve the world. You will see later how this theme reconnects with the tools I'm building today but before that, you may recall that I mentioned earlier meeting BJ Fogg. You may not know, but in 2007, BJ started exploring the use of technology to design behavior. The conversations we have had over the years ranged from tech to training psychologists to how things like Facebook (META) were going to forever change the world. The classes and research lab at Stanford that BJ ran shaped a generation as he influenced the founders

of Snapchat, Instagram, and Tristan Harris, the man behind "The Social Dilemma" documentary.

Image of Richard Branson during the launch of Virgin America's Nerd Bird and the launch of our inflight mobile social network; Here On Biz.

No More Missed Connections: Virgin Unveils First-Ever Airborne Social Network

Virgin America has partnered with the location-based business app Here On Biz to facilitate networking among its passengers both on the ground and in the air.

virgin america here on biz

Article about our software being launched inflight with Virgin America

Image of Guy Kawasaki promoting our inflight social network and inflight startup pitch day.

Photo of Sir Richard Branson kissing me while on a plane for a photo shoot. Long but funny story.

When World's Collide

As you can imagine, diving into startups and the world of business mixed in with my social impact and non-profit background served as a unique foundation. It felt a bit like Jekyll and Hyde. In my 20's, I was asked to speak at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology about the future of mobile devices and residential real estate. I was also asked to speak at a funeral for a 17 year old boy who committed suicide over a speeding ticket. The young man believed his family would never forgive him. Both speaking engagements made me nervous, but addressing a crowd of nearly 1,000 students about hope in the face of fear is an experience that stays with you. The belief that there is something so much more important and sacred than just making money was continuing to become very real.

In 2011, I found myself living in Los Angeles and being known as an "entrepreneur" who had sold multiple tech startups and had a background in nonprofits. As I began expanding my network in LA, I was invited to join the Milken Institute, an economic think tank, as one of their young leaders. Our work there focused on solutions for job creation, access to capital, and accelerating medical cures. During this time, I was able to be part of early conversations that shaped crowdfunding policy and even later was able to participate in discussions that led to the Chips and Science Act. My invitation to join this economic think tank coincided with the early days of the Occupy Movement and the destabilizing US economy—an impactful dichotomy that I do not forget. Participants in the Occupy movement expressed frustration and anger towards what they saw as a system that favored the wealthy elite at the expense of the majority. They were frustrated with economic policies, corporate greed, and perceived many social injustices. High unemployment rates, student loan debt, and the widening wealth gap fueled a demand for change in the existing socio-economic and political systems. Many people criticized the lack of a clear agenda or leadership within the Occupy Movement, while others questioned the effectiveness of how they chose to protest, but for me one thing was abundantly clear... there was a need for something better.

The early part of my career, working with disadvantaged youth and the poor in both the United States and internationally, provided an odd and wonderful backdrop to my two contrasting worlds of "haves and have not's". I'd be in a ballroom listening to powerful ceo's one minute and then talking with protesters from the occupy movement the next about what kind of change they hoped for.

This experience was sobering and began shaping my "next act".

I began to write and ponder how to solve these seemingly intractable problems. This evolved into an all encompassing vision to redesign-

ing high school education, welfare programs, social security, philan-thropy, and government r & d into both new managed programs and city wide social gatherings. A completely new approach that would align workforce training and government subsidies/entitlements with market based innovation needs. In essence I was trying to turn stu-dents, senior citizens, and anyone who was unemployed or underem-ployed into a national innovation network. A total reset of economic incentives that could serve as a modern merit-based, inclusive, social and economic infrastructure for our nation. A potential way to spark a profound societal shift that honored the new and unexpected pres-sures facing society and capitalism. My goal was and is to provide a vision and plan that can reshape the way we approach work and being human; harmoniously and abundantly unleashing the best in people and economies simultaneously.

A way to unleash the masses as the world's innovation lab.

A Theory Takes Shape

As this vision took shape I began to look for ways to run experiments. As a bold move, I chose a small town in a rural state to deploy the basic concepts as a test to build and align grassroots social and economic infrastructure with the workforce and innovation needs of the "kings of capitalism". This adventure introduced me to friends and rooms I could never have imagined. I was having personal conversations about investing in overlooked people and places with an economist from the Walton Family, a Kennedy family member, and a Rothschild.

My world has seen both sides of the coin. I have worked with or-phans in the slums of Peru and then found myself in rooms with Michael Milken, Ray Dalio, Ken Griffin, and other billionaires as

they discussed the need for better approaches to capitalism to address the growing concern of a potential class war due to the inequality of opportunity.

Photo I took in Trujillo, Peru after a day of working in the slums.
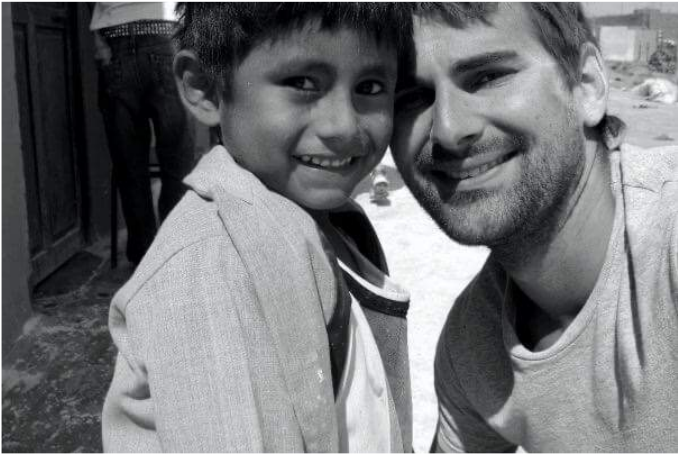
A new friend I made in Peru.

Did you know that in Peru, some of the housing for the poor can be found in old landfill locations—literal dumps? This is where I ran summer camp activities for kids whose parents had either died or given them up to the orphanage. I have countless stories of children so desperate to be hugged, just wanting to be seen or noticed. Meanwhile, others would act out angrily or with hostility toward us due to the sadness and realities of their situations. I've been bitten and spat on by children who have no social skills, who drink Coca-Cola because it is cheaper and cleaner than the water they can get—they are angry at life.

As each day ended in Peru, I'd watch an exhausted bunch of high school students from the United States who were too cool to show emotion at school in the U.S. bawl their eyes out as they left each day due to a deeper understanding of the realities of pain in the world. These moments, where raw emotions collide with stark realities, leave a "forever" mark on one's life—especially when contrasting them with

experiences of a room filled with billionaires discussing shared prosperity.

Bloomberg News even highlighted the irony of one experience I was fortunate to participate in. They made note of the exorbitant prices for drinks, food, and event tickets, underscoring how detached everyone in the room must be from the world's harsh realities. I am grateful to be someone who has spent time both in the slums with the poor and at the Beverly Hilton alongside the world's richest.

Ken Griffin, Citadel CEO on Bloomberg News at the Milken Global Conference I was attending.

Photo I took while at the conference of Ray Dalio, Michael Milken, and Ken Griffin.

As I ran more tests, I would find myself asking questions about ideas that might be a key piece to scaling the plan—something BETTER.

I once had a conversation with an Administrator of a University, Dr. Buck, who told me about a federal education system that had professors and offices in every single County and Parish. He shared this with because I had expressed my idea and need for a nationwide network of buildings where we could run events, offering locals a chance to connect with like-minded people, **discover** the future happening in their own town, and receive tools and mentorship to take steps toward goals they **dreamed** about. I had asked both leaders at Apple and Walmart to allow me to run tests out of their stores as a rural and urban strategy, but at the time, I was told no. So this news of an alternative system with professors and a relationship to research universities was a

breath of fresh air and sounded like an even better plan! I was sold and decided I had to try and broker a partnership to connect residents of a state with community experiences that would allow them to **discover** the future, **dream** about their role in it, **design** a plan, and work towards **delivering** on that plan with new found friends... right in their own towns!

Fast forward, and this led to my participation in the launch of an award-winning coding program on Native American Reservations, in military base communities, in the state capital, and small rural towns across an entire state. I collaborated with Apple Inc., Eric Schmidt's Family Foundation (known as Schmidt Futures), the Land Grant Universities, and the Cooperative Extension System. When this system was implemented, we even had events and an innovation program in the city where Napoleon Dynamite was filmed. This experience only emboldened my belief that systems can and should be changed.

I have been fortunate to co-author bipartisan federal legislation to reform the ways we invest in building grassroots communities and economies. It has been shaped directly by the experiment you just read about and by years of conversations and meetings in communities all around the world. I kid you not, this "idea" has taken me to hundreds of cities and multiple countries as we have delivered projects in 12 states and three countries. I've met with the president of a central bank in the afternoon and then with a family living in poverty that evening. I will find myself attending a high school football game in the Mississippi Delta as the only white man in the entire stadium and then the next minute walking the streets with a mayor talking with residents of a town that experienced a 5x jump of babies being born with drug withdrawals due to the opioid crisis.

Image of one of the sites for the free coding program launch.

Another front porch conversation as I walked small town America. This community saw the number of babies born with drug withdrawals spike by five fold.

A quiet street in the southern part of the United States that is empty and night and full of broken windows.

Religion, Politics, And Gunfire

Much of my life has been shaped by experiences touching both poverty and wealth, but it also delves deep into societal, political, religious, and tribal experiences. I have been stopped at gunpoint in the middle of a desert; driven in the Middle East as rockets were fired overhead; played the role of David in a re-enactment of David vs. Goliath in the Elah Valley; drank Turkish coffee in the mornings with my Muslim friends in Africa; walked and talked about the capture of Saddam Hussein and U.S. military strategy with my skeptical friends in Israel.

I will never forget walking past riot gear on the steps of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem and thinking about the very complex and fragile world we live in. I don't know all the answers; I don't know all the

stories of how we got here, I don't think all of my ideas are right, but I do think often about these moments as they inform my actions and intent.

An image I took at the Temple Mount during one of my trips to Israel.

Riot shields leaning against the wall at the Temple Mount.

Photo prayers being offered at the Wailing Wall, also called the Kotel.

It was 2021 and I was en route to a meet with a man who is now a director of the New York state prison employment program. We were

getting together to discuss innovative ways to integrate the work we do with his. Before reaching his office, I pulled over to FaceTime with the CEO of a former U.S. President's Family Foundation to discuss legislation I had been working on to provide people who are out of work with better pathways to learn modern skills through community based innovation activities, the National Innovation and Modern Skills Training Act. As we spoke, I walked near the mostly empty industrial office of a company that once employed 45,000 people in the town, it now only employed 600.

This city and the setting around me served as an perfect backdrop to our conversation. As I walked through the entrance of a run down city park there were a group of men sitting around, listening to rap music, and smoking weed. As I walked deeper into the park our conversation revolved around the need for policy changes; new and better approaches to inspire, honor, and activate the masses—moving beyond impotent government programs that leave people isolated, depressed, and hopeless. As I was providing an update on the status of the legislation and the strategic next steps, gunfire broke out. We both stopped talking as we heard the shots. He looked at me through the FaceTime and asked, "Is that gun fire?" With my heart racing I began to look around and confirmed that yes it was and I began to run back toward my car. He stayed on the call with me to ensure I got to safety as I quickly moved back to my car and back on the road. Just seconds before the shots broke out, I had mentioned the men at the entrance of the park and pointed out how this new policy was designed for people just like them. A new social and economic infrastructure that honors and empowers the potential inside each of them. The need for better ways to provide clear on-ramps to the "American Dream" became continually and painfully evident.

During this same decade, I had watched a documentary called, 'Requiem For the American Dream'. It was by Noam Chomsky and I had

never heard of him. The data in it was challenging to me and pushed me even harder to share what I had come up with as a solution to many of the issues he was laying out. The film inspired me to reach out to him and see if he would be open to meeting and discuss my work and theory of change. Long email threads eventually lead to Dr. Noam Chomsky's and I discussing modern capitalism and new approaches to social and economic inclusive merit based systems. Our conversation was lively, and I continue to believe there is a more beautiful and moral way to deliver the benefits of capitalism without the damage we often see.

It has been one interesting life. I have keynoted a conference alongside of Former Speaker of the House Republican Paul Ryan and I have been interviewed on Bloomberg News right next to California Governor and Democrat Gavin Newsom. This wild ride over the last 10 years has taken me to over 400 communities across the globe with one mission: *"**how do we create a BETTER system?"** A system that would leave us ALL proud of the lives we live and the world we create.

Noam Chomsky and I after an afternoon of discussing my goals, theories, and experiments.

Former speaker of the House Paul Ryan and I after we spoke at an economics and industry trends conference.

Governor Gavin Newsom and I being interviewed by Bloomberg News Anchor, Emily Chang.

I share some of my life experiences to show you that I am deeply committed to trying to design solutions that lift others out of poverty while preserving a merit-based system. I am not tethered to any particular political ideology; my aim is to shape a world that not only heals the hearts, minds, and bodies of the broken but also unleashes incredible economic abundance. My life has been a balance between the worlds of social and economic impact. This book delves into the

science and art of uniting these two worlds. I'm here to share the lessons I've learned, personally and professionally, about designing communities for social and economic impact.

The future relies on individuals like you and me—those dedicated to sparking a BETTER future.

It is time we begin to build cities in a manner that honors the power and potential locked inside each person. We need to turn city building into a team sport—a movement of human flourishing built on each of us setting goals bigger than ourselves and doing so in community. Why in community? Because it builds bonds with others in a way that makes you proud of your fellow man and ourselves. It builds bridges as we strive to achieve our goals and forces us to ask for help from others who care about us. It builds perspectives that the world is not as bad as we may have thought and hope that we can and are doing something about the mess we have made.

You may have noticed by now that I have a tendency to look at problems and passionately try to do my best to make a difference. Often, I like to look for disruptive, unique, and innovative ways to accomplish my goals, and that hasn't changed. I learned this by meeting and studying people like Tony Fadell, the Godfather of the iPod and iPhone and Daniel Kottke, employee one at Apple and Steve Jobs roommate. One thing they all have in common is that they, along with BJ Fogg, question the poor use of technology in society and the negative impacts it has on humans. I agree and I say it is time we fight back and we use systems, psychology, culture design, policy, and technology to build a better way. We can't shrink back and only let pointless platforms use the best strategies and softwares, we need to unleash human potential and deepen connections in communities using the same tactics and tools. Brad Smith, President of Microsoft

once commented that technologies are tools or weapons. I think it is time we use them better.

Article from FastCompany quoting Tony Fadell, who is one of the key contributors to the iPhone and iPod at Apple.

Picture I took of Chuck Salter, Sr. Editor of Fast Company, interviewing Tony Fadell and a startup founder.

The Formula for Phone Addiction Might Double As a Cure

Ten years ago, a Stanford lab created the formula to make technology addictive. Now, Silicon Valley is dealing with the consequences.

article from Wired Magazine discussing the belief that BJ Fogg's model on behavior that addicted society to the wrong thing could be redesigned to focus on the right thing.

To get moving with offering you and the world better tools, I wrote this book to kick-start a global conversation about better social and economic infrastructure but I also helped start 4 companies that operate collectively, focusing on unlocking better human and economic performance—a system designed to help us all "human" better.

These companies are:

- **Build Cities:** A digital network built on the BETTER method, allowing people worldwide to share their projects

and skills, gather for events, and collaborate locally and globally. It is designed for universal use, with features for governments, corporations, and real estate developers to attract and support their target residents, employees, and tenants by providing better social and economic infrastructure. Build Cities is the modern work, live, play, learn, create network, and within less than 12 months, the user base has spanned 200 cities. Join us and find what you have been looking for personally and professionally.

- **Innovation Collective:** A community design firm built on the BETTER method that has designed and delivered social and economic impact strategies for governments, family offices, real estate developers, and corporate clients across 13 states and in three countries.

- **ReAlign Ventures:** A venture fund, but not your typical venture fund, as it is built to support the BETTER method. The firm partners with communities using the BETTER method and works alongside them to surface, support, invest, and scale breakthrough ideas from these people. It deploys a network of over 300 mentors spanning the globe into BETTER communities. They participate in pitch days, think tanks, and leadership retreats, helping us identify great people and ideas as we deploy wisdom, access, and capital to the next great entrepreneurs.

- **IC ReBuild:** An industry leader in designing, developing, and activating properties for the modern work, live, play, learn, create lifestyle using the BETTER method as the super amenity. It operates from a belief that the real estate industry has created emotionless "boxes" and lazily relied on market forces to fill them up. ReBuild uses an approach to activate

properties and attract or retain tenants that redefines the
"why" behind the "where."

I share these companies to help you see that I am taking this very
seriously and am here to do my part. I would encourage you to check
the companies out on our website for Aesop Industries Inc.

To close out this chapter, I want to share an article I wrote in December 2017. It was later published in *VentureBeat*, in January of 2018.
This article will help you understand that this book has been years in
the making. We have refined what we have learned from thousands of
events while helping unleash the creator inside of tens of thousands of
people.

VentureBeat 2018:

> *Over the past few years, economic inequality has become a topic of focus for economists, politicians, and leaders of industry. Tech titans and politicians are starting to discuss concepts like the future of capitalism, universal basic income, and wealth redistribution as the technology they've developed starts to automate more and more jobs.*

New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Seattle have seen average wages rise at an unprecedented rate, while smaller towns across middle America have, in many cases, lost jobs and businesses. This has been compounded by a mix of highly skilled talent fleeing to coastal technology hubs, the disruption of tradition- al industries, and the dis- integration of a communal spirit of working towards a brighter future.

This opportunity gap be- tween big cities and small towns has raised the ques- tion: Is the U.S. facing eco- nomic doom and gloom, or is it on the brink of finding a way to reignite the American dream? At the very heart of Amer- ica is the thought that everyone is created equal and that Americans can,

through their own hard work, be successful. But as more and more jobs become automated through robotics and artificial intelligence, will this hold true?

Many different plans have been proposed as of late. Some call for teaching more people to code, others focus on bringing manufacturing back to American soil or creating clusters of research. Would these investments help? Yes. Will they create a path to upward mobility for millions of Americans? No. There is a much more urgent problem that government and economic agencies often overlook: the lack of authentic, inclusive community that is rampant in our nation.

Building a BETTER community:

What is an authentic, inclusive community? Can it really affect a nation's economy?

An authentic, inclusive community is one where anyone can on a regular basis meet together, share their story, understand each other's strengths and weaknesses, and rally around a shared goal whereby they assist each other in turning their dreams into reality. It is a community where groups of people gather outside of industry cliques and paid networking events. All people, regardless of their professional background, have an open-door invite to meet up and help each other address their personal and professional goals.

Today in the U.S., the majority of Americans do not have $500 in savings to cover a surprise bill. Loneliness is now considered by many to be an epidemic, and more Americans than ever are suffering from anxiety, stress, and depression. It is safe to say that many humans in the U.S. could hardly be described as "flourishing." And if the people of a society are not able to give the best versions of themselves to their work, families, and community, their job performance will suffer. As more and more people find themselves in similar states of existence, companies will face decreased performance. If enough industries are plagued by a lack of excellence in their workforce, an entire nation's GDP will suffer a blow.

How then can cities begin to build authentic, inclusive communities? I believe they have been focusing on the wrong plans. Government and civic organizations have thrown money at one-size-fits-all solutions. Towns often compete with one another just to convince a large corporation to move to town — a corporation that may very well end up leaving a few years later for another town.

Instead, towns across the nation must now begin the real work of creating a tight-knit community that can work together toward a shared economic goal.

For the past four years, we've been quietly developing a model to do just that through the Innovation Collective, an economic transformation agency.

The Innovation Collective encourages towns to set up a monthly gathering of neighbors, friends, coworkers, and strangers where they talk with local leaders and entrepreneurs who love their town. You may be tempted to think that there isn't anyone like that in your town; you would be wrong. The woman who has run the grocery store for 25 years; the man who has owned a car dealership for 15 years; the CEO of the community hospital; the janitor at the local high school: Each of them has inspiring stories to tell, lessons to pass on, and a strong vision for the community they live in.

These events are inclusive: Anyone can come, free of charge, and over free refreshments meet other people just like them. Anyone who attends gets to spend

time talking with those telling their story. Anyone who comes can share their struggles, ask for help, and even ask for vetting of the startup idea they've always dreamed about. From middle school students to retired multi-millionaires, everyone is treated as an equal.

Events like these are vital as they remind us that there is more everyone can give to their community. The Innovation Collective meetings are non-partisan and non-religious and are often hosted in parks, pubs, or local restaurants. Many patrons even provide event specials as they pack their venues with people who will now associate their establishment with feelings of connectedness and community.

Leveraging community to unleash a BETTER economy:

Once these strategic gatherings are taking place on a regular basis and there is a genuine, inclusive community being developed, people can begin to focus on applying their skill sets to the future of work. Rather than looking for the silver bullet to slay their economic woes, cities and towns can begin to understand how to reassemble themselves into what I call "Inclusive Research and Development Communities." When a community has rallied around a shared focus within a single technology vertical, they can create a hub of research and development that anyone can participate in. In Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, for example, government officials and residents settled

on making the city a hub for robotics. Students now compete at middle-school science fairs to come up with the best project involving robotics, while the local community colleges have introduced courses in robotics motion control.

In the communities that have employed the Innovation Collective plan, children are sending robots into space, adults are improving their financial habits, startups are being founded by unlikely individuals who have gone on to become celebrated innovators, and overall economies have been reactivated and focused. These communities are becoming powerful engines of inclusive, community-based innovation, talent, and IP.

So my proposal is simple: If you want to lead your community toward an economic reformation, it starts with building community. The Innovation Collective has even written out a field guide to share what we've found that works.

Together, I believe that towns across America can reimagine what it means to offer an inclusive community and equal opportunity.

Since this article was written in 2017, what has changed in the world?

- Loneliness data has worsened...

- Depression has worsened...

- Divisiveness in nations has spiked...

- More jobs are being automated away...

- Mental health issues are rampant...

- A shrinking middle class has expanded...

- The next generation thinks being an influencer is the best

job...

- And yet philanthropic efforts to repair the negative trends have increased without winning results...

However, let's take a look at the city I wrote about in the article. What has changed there since 2017...

- 740 direct jobs were created due to new companies tied to the BETTER community

- 350+ patents have been filed from startups tied to the BETTER community

- The city shot up the ranks to #2 in the United States for the number of startups formed per capita

- The city shot up 26 spots to #4 best performing small city in the United States

- A PHD program in the community vertical, robotics, was created. There is no University main campus based there...

- A state wide rapid learning robotics program was launched with support from Boeing

- A 19.1% drop in people below the poverty line

- An 11% household income increase

- 5 new schools focused on project-based learning and entrepreneurship have been created

- Apple, Inc and the Land Grant University Extension system

created a state-wide coding school that included free laptops
for participants. Including on tribal lands, military commu-
nities, urban, and rural cities.

- Over 150,000 sq ft of derelict real estate has been redeveloped
  into spaces housing startups tied to the BETTER commu-
  nity. This includes an abandoned elks club, a historic train
  depot, and a failed Barnes and Noble.

- Most importantly... tens of thousands of people have en-
  gaged in setting goals, learning skills, and gathering to cel-
  ebrate the journey.

Now that we've established the spirit and purpose behind this book,
the next chapters are my effort to share the lessons learned and provide
you with the tools and tactics we've created. Together, you and I can
change the world. Society cannot consume its way out of the mess we
find ourselves in. **As hard as we try, pills cannot fix the current
social and economic issues in society. You know what can? Pat-
terns—patterns in how we spend our lives and with whom we
spend them.**

Onward to a BETTER world!

Chapter 3
Paint By Numbers

Our hope is that this book can become your trusted guide on a mission to create change in the world, however books like this can also feel overwhelming if they aren't detailed enough... or too detailed without the right structure...

We have done our best to ensure that you get the inspiration, narrative story, and basics of the playbook as we teach you how to launch grass roots creative communities, engage strategically with local government and investors, and transform the world. No small task, but we are going to try.

So as you read through this book, keep in mind that we have a main goal. To help achieve that goal, we have broke it down into sections in each chapter to teach the art and science of this magical community, economic, and human transformation "thing" we have created.

Before we dive into how best to use the format and sections, let's recap the one main goal... convince you that there is a more humane and awesome way to build communities and economies and in doing it the way we have designed, you unleash a magical beast in the communities called creativity and purpose.... This process brings out the weird, awesome, and inventive parts that economists often dryly call, "human capital". If you are bought into learning about and trying this idea then it is time for you to join our free global community

of revolutionaries who are transforming communities and economies together.

Remember in the first chapter how I said, "This book will provide you with a community of like minded world changers and a ton of tools to help you build the brighter tomorrow."

Well it is time to join that community. To get into our super secret awesome club of change makers you have to know that handshake, but if you don't know that then you can still get into the nerdy creative revolutionary club by reading this book, going to a website FlourishingPledge.com, signing the Flourishing Pledge and then you will be invited to quarterly gatherings where we gather online and occasionally in person, share best practices, and get to know each other better. Occasionally we even can provide special grants and partnerships that the Flourishing Pledge community has set up for the crew to participate in. So, once you have read the book head over to FlourishingPledge.com and join the crew as we all create a Flourishing world together.

Now, to the format and sections... in the chapters you will find sections titled; **Lessons Learned, Break It Down, Better In Action, Key Takeaways,** and **Suggested Actions**. Each of these are designed to share our journey with you in a way that turns the big mission into a step by step approach.

Here is how you should think about each section:

- **Lessons Learned:** This is the section designed to warm you up to each of the chapters and give you a bit of framing. Think of it as the walk around the block before we start the hike to that sections mountain top. After you read this section, you will hopefully feel ready to dive into the tactical part of each chapter.

- **Break It Down:** This is the section designed to give you some insights into the tactical way we understand, analyze, and act to build BETTER communities and economies. This area may feel dry at times because it is designed to be more of an instruction manual in this section. We will reference principles of psychology and economic development, and show you charts and graphs we have created to help you BETTER understand our methods.

- **Better In Action:** This is the section that tells you real stories about how the tactical work has empowered people in communities of all types. These stories will highlight the economic and personal growth that people and places have experienced.

- **Key Takeaways:** This is the section that boils down the chapter into one liners. Think of it as the TLDR. You could even use these as a series of mental triggers if you want. If so, look at these before you read each chapter and then you can return to Key Takeaways anytime you want to recall much of the chapter.

- **Suggested Actions:** These are a series of questions built to get your mental and creative juices flowing around the section you just read. As you think about the questions, they may lead you to new insights and ideas that you haven't had before. I would encourage you to journal your thoughts, questions, ideas, and concepts. Remember... fun, new, crazy, big, and unique ideas are ok. In fact... they are awesome! No one is here to judge you. Einstein once said, "We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them." Let your brain create BETTER ideas.

Chapter 4
The Thesis

As we send this ship out to sea, let's dive into key things that we believe and make sure we will enjoy this ride together. The things you are about to read are foundational building blocks to every action we take as an organization. It is important to get this established up front to help you understand where we are coming from and how it bridges to our "why".

So... here... we... go...

We believe that people everywhere are seeking belonging and purpose, and that society is struggling mentally, physically, and financially due to isolation, consumerism, and content overload.

We believe that capitalism has evolved, and new forces of automation, industry consolidation, capital concentration, and efficiencies have created increased access to goods. However, in parallel, society is struggling to find meaning and purpose in work and life.

We believe that "social capital" is the key to fostering successful and healthy towns and cities, both civically and economically. We believe that people can build strong social capital themselves through rituals and routines that encourage a positive culture.

We believe that investing in a culture-first approach (culture before concrete theory) is a more empowering, effective, and efficient way of creating the social infrastructure the world needs.

We believe that when this social infrastructure is built in a grassroots way and focuses on the hopes, dreams, and goals of people, it then develops strong grassroots startup ecosystems and creative economies, local venture and business investment, and downtown innovation campuses to drive sustained economic and human growth.

We believe that social infrastructure and startup ecosystems can be aligned with shared local economic interests and macroeconomic industry trends to heal and unleash communities and economies.

Now let's clarify what social capital is... one of my favorite researchers, Robert Putnam, defined it beautifully in his long and dry, but ground breaking book "Bowling Alone". He says it hinges on "relationships" and "reciprocity." It is a measure of the number of peer-to-peer connections and the level of trusted interactions. Abundant social capital in a community and in a personal life reduces business costs, fuels creativity, fosters innovation, establishes community support networks, enhances mental well-being, and elevates a city's desirability as a place to reside, among other benefits.

To clarify, social capital isn't about counting likes or hearts on TikTok or Instagram. It's about real-life, trusted connections that provide opportunities to earn and invest "trust and life currency" while "doing life" with others.

Intentionally designed social capital built the BETTER way is the old world solution that our modern world needs.
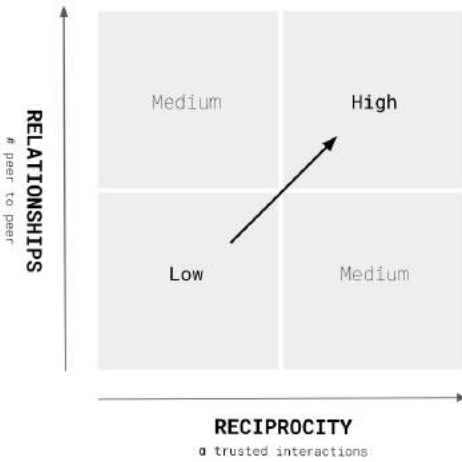
Social capital diagram developed by Innovation Collective

This can be built from within a community by encouraging a positive culture - one that brings a community together (bonding) and links the residents together (bridging). This can be accomplished through a set of rituals and routines we have tested and validated in many communities, in the US and beyond.

When applied correctly, these rituals and routines can inclusively empower people to lift themselves and in parallel their community from the critical list, to seeing creative kernels appear; developing an enterprise cluster; and establishing an innovation campus or district that is aligned with capital and corporate relationships to provide the additional mentorship and capital required to build a self-sustaining ecosystem that creates the type of community we all dream about.
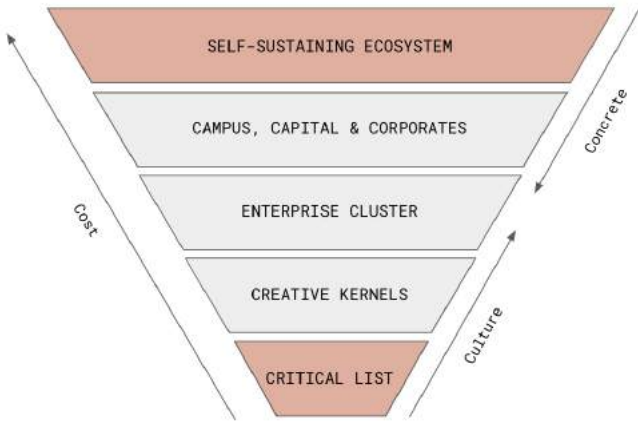
The 5 Levels of a "City-as-an-Incubator" diagram diagram created by Innovation Collective

Culture is key and… it is the easiest, cheapest, and most exciting part of the journey. It enables a community and those bought into the process to test and iterate before committing to bigger time and money investments, and creates the most agency and buy in at a local level. It is also the fastest way to show success and build community belonging built to complement economic development. This is the bottom up way to build or rebuild a city.

Key Takeaways:

- Abundant and inclusive social capital is the key to awesome towns and cities. This also applies to a real estate campus and a corporation.

- People can build social capital through rituals and routines that encourage a positive culture and heal personal issues.

- Investing in and starting with culture-first is a more empow-

ering, effective, and efficient way of building strong communities and economies.

Suggested Actions

- Think of some people or places within your community that encourage others to meet up regularly.

- Think of both events that bring like-minded people together and ones that create bridges between different groups or communities.

- What are the pluses and minuses of each?

- Who runs these gatherings and why do people go there?

- What is involved in making these different gatherings happen?

Chapter 5
The Approach

Now that we have established our thesis on social capital, let's shift our focus to a major need of both governments and corporations: economic growth. Governments want a stronger tax base, a robust workforce, and vibrant new real estate developments and schools. Corporations want incredible talent, a consistent pipeline of innovation, and a community that supports their growth.

Governments and corporations are literally spending hundreds of billions every year trying to achieve these things and how they approach it often feels tone deaf. In the world today, it seems like "The MAN" makes plans that are truly disconnected from the genuine needs of people.

We firmly believe that this doesn't have to be the reality. In fact not only can this conflict can be resolved, but we have seen it work where both the "The MAN" and the huMAN can win together. In this section we will demonstrate how to start aligning social infrastructure objectives with economic goals. As we all have seen, it is unfortunately common practice for governments and corporations to take the "top-down" approach when "fixing" economic development and problem-solving for social issues.

This approach centers on their often limited perception of what needs improvement, such as number of jobs, how to build an economic

hub, and ways to bring in outside investment. While well-intentioned, this approach fosters a sense of dependency and reliance, rather than nurturing agency, resilience, and skills that communities require in our rapidly changing world.

Furthermore, this approach tends to elevate individuals as heroes who swoop in to "fix" communities, instead of fostering collective engagement in the challenging and purposeful work needed to shape a brighter future. When we fail to involve the community in this work, we limit the range of potential solutions and rob others of the joy and purpose that comes from actively contributing to meaningful change.

Just like every individual, every town, city, and organization possesses hidden strengths and untapped potential. This perspective leads to adopting what is often referred to as an "asset-based approach" to community engagement. We use questions and conversations as tools to unveil the existing strengths, superpowers, and opportunities waiting to be unleashed.

This approach is commonly called Appreciative Inquiry, a psychological model of change that empowers individuals to drive their own journey of growth and change.
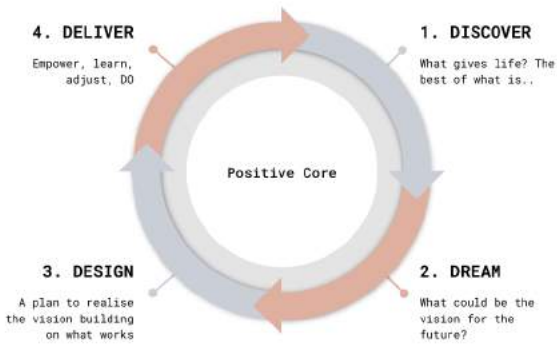
The "Strengths Theory Flywheel" created by Innovation Collective

Our approach is therefore "inside out" and "bottom up" rather than "top-down". It builds on a community's inner strengths and what to grow. Based on questioning and envisioning what might be, it helps people nurture the shared culture, systems, and social infrastructure needed to unleash human flourishing, therefore tackling the changes and challenges they face.

We also sometimes call this "culture before concrete".

TOP-DOWN	INSIDE-OUT
Solve problems	Build on strengths
Focus on what to fix	Focus on what to grow
Lead with answers	Lead with questions
Analyse possible solutions	Envision what might be
Focus on external intervention	Build local agency
Create jobs	Build systems
Lead with concrete	Lead with culture
Foreign Direct Investment	Local Creator Encouragement

The "2 Paths" to city building chart created by Innovation Collective

There are several different models that guide how Appreciative Inquiry is practiced in the world, but all of them draw on five generic steps:

1. Choose the positive as the focus of inquiry

2. Inquire into stories of life-giving forces

3. Locate themes that appear in the stories and select topics for further inquiry

4. Create shared images of a preferred, dare I say BETTER, future

5. Find innovative ways to create that future

The approach we use, because it works, we call the "BETTER Flywheel". When you follow our process, it creates what we call a Flourishing Plan for the community to follow. It has three key phases that are:

1. **Map Strengths** - We map a community's strengths, identi-

fy their BETTER Story and align around a positive future state, which we call the community's Picture of Success.

2. **Light the Spark** - By implementing our events and experience series called Story Stack®, we "light the spark" that ignites a fuse that launches and sends the community on a journey around their BETTER Story. This process encourages and supports the residents as they build the BETTER future, together.

3. **Build Sustainably** - At each stage of the journey, we work towards building social infrastructure that can fund the progress, community gatherings, and develop beyond the initial time and/or money invested. This is done through memberships, venture investments, sponsorships, corporate and real estate partnerships so that communities can continue to refine their strengths, encourage each other, and grow.

3. BUILD SUSTAINABLY

Commercial approach to fund ongoing development of social infrastructure to build sustainably

1. MAP STRENGTHS

Creative discovery with local community to align core strengths, industry needs and core sponsors

BETTER Flywheel

2. LIGHT THE SPARK

Rituals that connect the community around the BETTER Story and encourage them to build

The "Better FlyWheel" created by Innovation Collective

We will get into the details of each in the next few chapters, but remember... this approach - inside out and focussed on becoming

self-sustaining - empowers communities everywhere to take control of their own destiny and build human flourishing systems for themselves, their families, friends, and the entire community. This is not how society runs right now and we must decide if we are happy with the current results of the culture we live in or if we will be bold enough to try something new, something BETTER that unleashes the best in all of us, respects the magic in others, provides structure and purpose so that we can do our part to turn around our struggling economies and communities.

Key Takeaways:

- The BETTER approach is built on Appreciative Inquiry.

- It has three key stages - map strengths, light the spark, build sustainably.

- It empowers communities to take control of their own destiny and not sit around waiting on "heroes".

- The approach has one goal in mind: human flourishing

- You must decide if you like the way things are or are up for trying something BETTER.

Suggested Actions

- Identify a time when you or a group you were involved in felt empowered to do something awesome in your community. What made you feel empowered? What can you take away from that?

- When have you felt most proud of your community?

- When have people in your community, either now or in the

past, done amazing things? What did it take to accomplish positive change? What made it possible? What can you learn from that success?

The Magic Three

Lessons Learned:

Hopefully by now, we have established our thesis that social capital is crucial and that we believe it can be designed in such a way that it aligns with economic opportunities of a region or company, and that it can be aligned in such a way that it is life giving and fun for the residents participating; not something that feels like "the MAN" is taking from you. If we are abundantly clear about our belief in that, then it is time to begin exploring the three foundational blocks of our work... "The Magic Three".

Before we dive into the these, let me be clear... I firmly believe that cities and communities must reimagine their approach to economic development and strategic initiatives, city building, as a collective endeavor.

It needs to become a team sport again and stop being a spectator sport.

All too often, city approaches to projects turn into overly formal Request for Proposals (RFPs) that favor out-of-town professionals or become closed room projects, unintentionally sidelining, overlooking, and disheartening locals in doing the work of shaping their own towns. Sustainability and growth plans for cities become an exercise in trading land and/or tax base for jobs. Another celebratory ribbon cutting ceremony, which is really a political photo opportunity, is

put together when an Amazon distribution center decides to call the community home.

This is not a win. This is a poison pill to the dreams of a community and, at best, jobs which aren't going to lead to the stronger community or economy you dreamed of.

What is needed is an approach reminiscent of an old-fashioned Amish barn raising! Have you ever watched one?!?! You can find videos of these on the internet and if you are lucky you can find one that is a time lapse.... mind blown! They ooze of a spirit of unity and collaboration that results in sweat on our brows, dirt under our fingernails, and pride in our hearts when a shared goal is achieved.

I once heard a remarkable story that comes from Ojai, California, where the city planned, designed, and budgeted for a park. When the residents saw the proposed plan and budget, they were shocked at the price and quality of what they were getting for it. The residents rebelled and insisted that they take the lead on the project, ultimately constructing a larger, more awesome, and more cost-effective park. The result was not only a BETTER park, but also a greater degree of community engagement that allowed locals to shine and contribute to the shared dream of their community.

I've played on this park with my sons and... it is awesome!

This approach to planning, building, and sustaining BETTER communities and economies is precisely what this book is about. This is the change in the world we are helping to lead.

The next section will walk you through an overview of the key ingredients, The Magic Three, that you will learn about in detail throughout the remainder of the book. These are the building blocks of a BETTER way.

Break it down:

Now to the technical pieces. We have come to learn that there are three ingredients that are key for a community to move from being on the critical list to becoming a self-sustaining ecosystem using our "inside-out" or "culture-first" approach in the previous chapter.
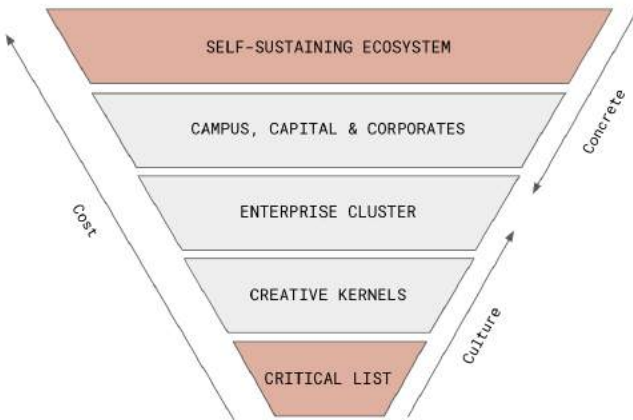
The 5 Levels of a "City-as-an-Incubator" diagram diagram created by Innovation Collective

1. **BETTER Story** - A narrative that builds on the core strengths of the people and place; addresses real industry needs; and has strong buy-in from positive sponsors representing the wider community.

2. **Success Showcase** - A way of celebrating wins, and honoring and encouraging the efforts of each other on a regular basis, both within the community and to the wider world.

3. **Sustained Support** - An understanding of how to tell that

story to stakeholders/clients regionally, nationally and globally to build interest, alignment, and investment, so a community can sustain and scale their efforts AND so industry partners can experience the benefits from the work of the community.

Together, this builds: **confidence** - a community's belief in their ability to make it happen; **credibility** - a belief by others that the community can; and **access to capital** - investment in venture, talent and infrastructure to back it up; which together assemble the raw ingredients to deliver a win. Later, we will go into each in more detail and share practical ways to make them a reality with any community.
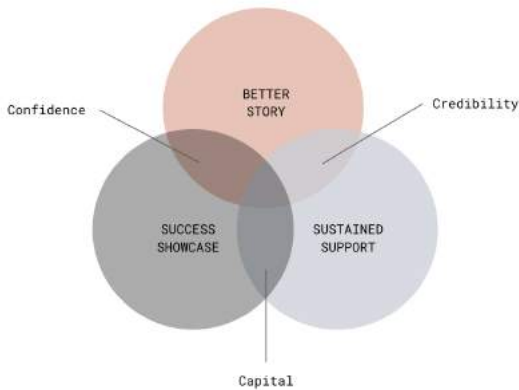
The "Key Inside Out" ingredients diagram created by Innovation Collective

Key Takeaways

There are three key ingredients needed for a community to move from being on the critical list to becoming a self-sustaining ecosystem:

- BETTER Story

- Success Showcase

- Sustained Support

Suggested Actions

Think of a moment where a community you are or were a part of set out on what felt like a big new adventure.

This could be your family going on a major road trip, the company you work for deciding to expand into a new market, a faith group building a new building, or a group of residents and friends wanting to improve a park.

- What were the things that gave you confidence that this was going to work?

- When did others outside of the group working on the project start to believe that you'd make it happen?

- If you required funding, what did you do to secure it?

Chapter 7

First, a BETTER Story

Lessons Learned:

Just like each and every one of us, a city or community of people need a big compelling vision that they can believe in.

Something massive!

Something awesome!

A picture of the future that is so inspiring that you can't help but see yourself trying to contribute to it. We all want to be proud of who we are becoming and that person we want to be proud of is NOT someone who doesn't make a difference in the world. This version of you is taking actions as you add your brush stroke to the community masterpiece of the BETTER world. Cities need one of these types of visions that bleed into a shared and personal narrative that motivates and mobilizes a town to gather for positive reasons as they do the work of unleashing the BETTER tomorrow, together, today.

Instead of having a big, beautiful, sexy, monumental, awesome vision, a community often becomes focused or obsessed with a narrative that is a nightmare. This is easy to do because life is hard and often people do stupid things; you and I included. So as a society we tend to drift toward complaining as we see the negative. Why... I have no clue, but

I do know that it doesn't add value or move us ahead. Instead it holds us all back.

"There is too much growth, too little growth, the economy is a mess, the government is corrupt, the youth keep leaving town, the traffic is awful, *have you seen our potholes, the democrats are trying to take over, the* republicans are trying to take over, *there are no good events in town, crime is out of control, who is going to do something about the homeless, the jobs here suck...".*

Do we have real problems in the world, yes. Very, very, very real problems that are much deeper than the list I just read. Problems that stem from how we have structured society.

Is it ridiculous how much we whine, complain, and infect other people with negativity instead of doing something positive to make a difference, yes? Be careful what you give your mind and words over to. If you keep telling a negative story and don't start acting out a positive one, the negative one will become your truth, your identity, your life and even worse yet... you might be successful at ensuring there will be no vision and the town and the people in it will all given up as they live like they are already dead.

"Where there is no vision, the people perish."

Occasionally a town will find some hope through something good that happens and they rally around it as they begin tell a positive story. Through this, they find a sense of togetherness. Sadly though, this often only happens when something like a sports team begins to get a few wins under their belt and this becomes the symbol and spirit of hope in a town. The wins do give a town pride and something positive to talk about. Haven't we have all seen the signs as we drive into a community, "Home of the 1973 softball state champions". "Home

of 'Dan' the 1964 Olympic Bronze Medalist". "Home of 'Janet' the 2021 Pacific Northwest chili dog eating champion."

This isn't horrible... but what if we could actually design a vision of a winning that mattered and invited everyone to get out of the stands and play their part and not just got us to buy tickets to a game...

That is what this next section is all about. It will walk you through a science backed proven method to dream, listen, and co-create a strong narrative that is mobilizing... something awesome people can talk about and live for. Once you execute this next section in the real world and apply it to your unique scenario, you will have a big vision people can get behind, a clear picture of what winning looks like, and a plan with events scheduled so others can join in this vision.

Break it down:

In our experience, to create a BETTER Story - a narrative that builds on the core strengths of a people and place (local super powers); addresses real industry needs (innovation talent and trends); and has strong buy-in from the stakeholders/clients and addresses their goals (what the leaders want) - it is important to bring together a broad group of people to synthesize this. This should be done through a series of workshops and conversations to surface the ACTUAL strengths of the community, map out what winning looks like, co-develop event programming, and build out the detailed roadmap or step by step plan of how to get there.

When done well, a community realizes that they are uniquely positioned to use their strengths to solve really big problems in the world and that there is an opportunity to build a valuable and bright future that includes the whole community in the creation of a robust and unique economy that adds value and beauty to the whole world.

When we run this process, the community goes on a journey with us where they...

1. **Discover** - Discover their community's "BETTER Story" - where strengths, stakeholders/clients, and industry needs align;

2. **Dream** - Start to dream of what might be - where there is clear potential, market fit, and the appetite for investment; or to put it another way, the potential standout innovation or creative focus for the town or city;

3. **Design** - Articulate their Picture of Success. This is their positive future state in three to four years. What will be happening then to show they've gotten there, how this will be sustained and why it matters to achieve it; and

4. **Deliver** - Plan out what they need to do to deliver on it together - who is responsible for what and how they're going to get there.
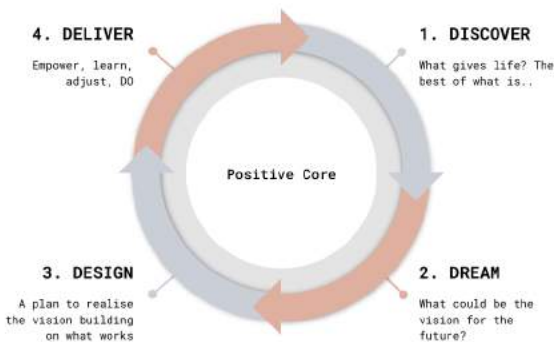
The "Strengths Theory Flywheel" created by Innovation Collective

Stages 1 and 2 we call "**Strength Mapping**". This results in a report that synthesizes the community's strengths, stakeholder/client goals, and industry needs. It should include a statement that articulates the town or city's center of gravity - its economic place in the world, what makes it standout, often termed the industry "vertical" it will build a compelling creative community engine (cluster) around. This Mapping should be aligned with the community and be something that stakeholders/clients can stand behind.

Stage 3 and 4 we call a community's "**Picture of Success"** and the roadmap of how to get there. This culminates in a bold positive statement of success 3 to 4 years out. It includes the what, why, how, who and when of how to achieve it and the sustained efforts in the long run. There should be a roll-out plan for a localized version of programming that utilizes the Story Stack® (more on this later) to help residents build and tell the community wide and their own BETTER Story. This phase will also include the time commitments, financial budgets and likely sources of funding to make it happen.

Strengths Mapping

Strengths Mapping is a process that helps a community write their BETTER Story. One of the focuses of the Strengths Mapping, is something we call the Vertical. The Vertical is a focus within the community. A specific topic that the city can use as their Center of Gravity when getting excited about their next business or creative idea so they can shape the actions and conversations of the community toward a shared goal. I can't emphasize how important it is to have a clear industry vertical for your community that everyone can throw their creative genius at. For example, you have no idea how many schools that I have talked to seeking a clear answer "what skills or industry should we be preparing our students for?" We truly believe

that most people do not care what problem they are solving or better stated, what kind of work they are doing. What they do care about is that they get to use skills they feel like are authentic to them, that they get to work with people they like and trust, that they get valued for the contributions they make, and that what they are working on actually matters in the world. When a community has a shared focus or Vertical it creates synergy, shared language, and focus. At the end of the Strengths Mapping process, the community will have a Vertical outlined.

We do this in three stages:

1. **Plan** - First, sit down with the project sponsor(s) or client in a workshop setting to get an initial understanding of the community strengths, industry needs and stakeholder/clients goals; and to agree on the plan and schedule for the first phase of the project. Both the practicalities, as well as the key questions we look to ask during the mapping process, and who to start with, etc.

2. **Map** - Then, conduct research, both through on-the-ground meetings with local people, individually and in groups, and through desk research to identify a community's strengths, positive partners, the sentiment of the community, and industry needs. Identify where there are significant and unique market opportunities, potential for broad buy-in, and an appetite for investment.

3. **Co-create** - Lastly, work with the stakeholders/clients and community in workshop settings to pinpoint the positive core or vertical, and craft a way to articulate the BETTER Story in a fashion that people can relate to, rally around, and share. This includes kick-off meetings where the community

can come and see the data collected, understand the vertical direction, and give feedback in a pure and organic way. This is done to ensure that the community is engaged as a part of the process of vertical creation, therefore increasing the support behind it.

It is important to note that while you operate in these three stages, the process is iterative and should include regular check-ins with both sponsors and the wider community as you co-create, iterate, validate and start to socialize the BETTER Story.
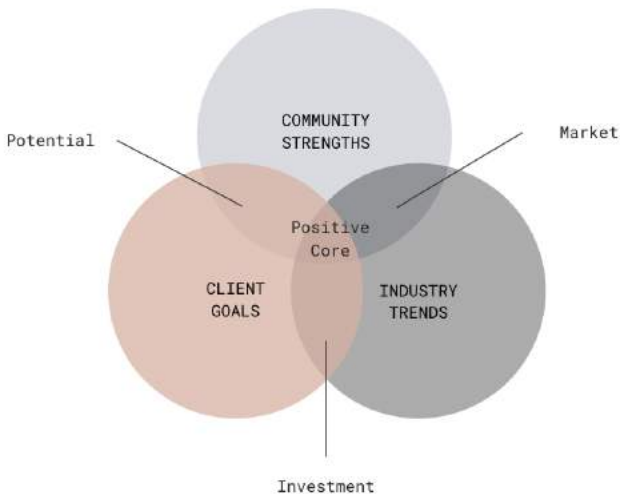
The "Mapping Thesis" diagram created by Innovation Collective. You will notice that Stakeholder and Client can be swapped out interchangeably.

Industry Needs

As a team, we have an in-depth understanding of global industry trends, talent, and innovation demands and when helping a community craft their BETTER story, we bring that knowledge and expertise to the table in a way that is unique. Often a city immediately jumps to wanting to be a health care or manufacturing focused economy. Why... because there is $$$$$ there when they read the reports. Well guess what... you and every other town want to be a health care/life sciences focus and I hate to burst your bubble but... it isn't smart to compete in spaces that are already crowded. If this confuses you, I'd suggest you read Blue Ocean Strategy. A great book on how to win in "open waters" instead of compete in over crowded spaces.

During the vertical selection process, dig deep and look more creatively at the unique super powers of your town. (Hint... tourism isn't an exportable good and to be viable you need to export value not just import people to consume your value.) As an example, imagine a town where the industry vertical focus was hair. Tell me... what city is the "future of hair"? Right... you don't know because every economic developer would think that isn't a valuable industry focus. Actually, if you establish a creative community focused on the hair industry, it could include chemistry, media and entertainment, fashion, manufacturing, software, medical, retail, etc. do you get it yet? The global hair care market size is anticipated to grow from $99.53 billion in 2023 to $147.49 billion by 2030. Again, tell me what city is the "future of hair"...

When we define a vertical for clients, we utilize our experience as start-up founders, venture capital investors, and the ongoing relationships with larger corporations that have partnered with us. We even have a network of over 200 innovation executives spanning all types of Indsutries that we bounce ideas off of and they help shape the focus to meet current and future demand.

At the start, middle, and end of the strengths mapping, we test and validate potential interest, by having structured conversations with our network of Fellows, corporations and investors, which helps us test and refine our strategies to ensure we can align the specific needs, resources, and goals of each community uniquely with the workforce and innovation needs of a high value growth industry.

Stakeholders/Clients

The core of our mapping process is made up of a series of 80+ intentional conversations with the target audience, community, and members of local groups to surface the strengths of the region and spot positive alignments.

Places you could go:

- Visit a city or county council/board meeting to talk about the process so that those who watch or read the minutes are aware of the process and can engage appropriately.

- Work with the city to put out a press release in the designated publication(s) to ensure that community members are aware of the process and can engage if they haven't yet.

- Visit local shops and downtown businesses to talk with owners, workers, and customers

- Visit local industry professionals, such as warehouses, factories, manufacturing facilities, to discuss with both management and employees

- Meet with key local organizations that already exist, such as rotary, churches, elks club, student government, community committees, chambers, and more

In some instances, we will run one of our event formats called Fireside Chats, where we interview a successful local leader to highlight and better understand their successes and failures and share them with the community. It is much like an in-person podcast interview. This helps draw people into the process, discover untapped strengths and partnerships.

Through all this we aim to...

- Spend time on the ground, engaging intentionally and organically with students, teachers, baristas, bar patrons, engineers, small business owners, etc. to understand not only what they see but also how they feel;

- Meet with leading professionals from the region with a vested interest in it flourishing - private investors, political leaders, directors of large businesses, administration of education institutions, etc.; and

- Have curated conversations with the membership of local groups - local economic development groups, employees of large employers, social clubs, spiritual organizations, community-minded non profits, and grassroots groups.

Community Strengths

In all of these conversations, ask open questions to understand the community's strengths and successes, to identify narratives, skills and assets, hints at potential, what to grow and build on, the people and organizations doing positive work, and better understand the past. Some of the questions may seem different, but they are an effort to understand trusted players/alignments in town and where to get the most helpful information. Often the future economic vision is tied

to the past because the local community still likely has overlooked wisdom, skills, connections and capital from the previous economy and this can be leveraged into a new vision of how the past maps to the future,

These questions should be shaped with the sponsors at the beginning of the project, but generally sound something like...

- What do you love about your community?

- What don't you love about your community?

- Who is a person in the community who is doing wonderful things for the town and often gets overlooked?

- What church do most people go to?

- Where do most people go to buy a car?

- What would make education in the community even better?

- What do you think the town's economy is best known for?

- What is a big opportunity you feel like the community is missing?

- What are the big economic moments for the town?

- If you could imagine an industry that everyone in town would love to get behind, what would it be?

- Tell me a story about a time when your town came together and accomplished something awesome.

- What were the circumstances?

- What do you remember most about it?

- How did the town work effectively together to achieve this?

- What strengths did you bring / could you have brought to the project?

- What roles did different groups or individuals play?

- How did these roles contribute to the overall achievement?

- How did you measure success?

- What was the most enduring aspect of the community's accomplishment?

- What made it sustainable?

- In what ways did it positively impact others?

- How could you utilize the strength of the town on other projects?

- Share a story of when you felt most alive and engaged as part of your community.

- Who was part of this experience? What contributed to it being so exciting and engaging?

- What's the number one positive thing about being a part of the community? How has it brought fulfillment and purpose to your personal life?

- What do you see as the three most desirable things about your town?

- Are there any hidden superpowers or odd but special things about your town?

Positive Core

Where the above three ingredients overlap - community strengths, stakeholders/clients goals, and industry needs; where there is local potential (real resources, strengths and support); market fit (local potential that meets growth industry needs); and an appetite for investment (industry needs where stakeholders/clients see possibility); that is where the magical positive core is, that is where we focus, where we start to craft and then build the BETTER Story.

A BETTER Story is more than a vertical in its traditional sectoral sense. It is the harmonization of three parts that often get overlooked. An articulation of the potential of a community, one that connects a diverse set of data points to culminate in a clear and compelling set of words that stakeholders/clients and industry can understand and gather around. Remember that growing industries are desperate for talent and innovations. They spend BILLIONS of dollars annually to acquire both. Your community can become a specialist in creating an outsized quantity of creative and innovative workers and startups built in such a way that includes the whole community in the process of becoming. This BETTER Story shows a town or city the amazing potential it has before it, inside and out, for each and every resident to come together and build. Not some generic vertical or future state imposed from the outside or the top being shouted down to "the people". To put it another way, it helps articulate a community's shared purpose as part of a wider world that gives local passion and pride.

Like any form of wordsmithing, it is a creative process, and for us, one that involves the community (aka the audience) and is tested, iterated, and validated as we go... like great stories always are. Once complete, the community should feel like they are ready to be David and ready

to punch above their weight class and show the Goliath industry that they are something special and the Goliath industry should be ready to root for David to bring his best effort because it only creates more innovation and talent that they need.

BETTER in Action:

"Can we say that?"

I remember standing there with the head of the University and a small group of local leaders. There was an obvious fear in the idea of declaring that we should be the "Future of Robotics".

Is it possible? Are we allowed to say that? Is it true yet?

There was a feeling in the room that if we decided to focus on that industry that other leaders in the town would feel jealous that we are focusing on a vertical they don't feel connected to and/or we might offend them. On and on the conversation ran.

Then there was the acknowledgment and realization that we have a chance to be a leader in a multi-billion dollar industry that was about to take off. The excitement and ideas started to percolate. Could we create 100 jobs in the robotics sector? Could we someday see a $10 million company here?

After a long conversation with the local manufacturing community, meetings with the local robotics clubs, and the realization that there was a robotics lab hidden in the woods outside of town that worked with multiple national space programs, it was decided...

Let's try it and see what happens.

So, it was announced. "Our town will be a world leader in robotics"

Oh man... What did we do? Can we really do this?

Fast forward 6 years...

This community has multiple $100M plus robotics companies.

This community has a PHD program in robotics that works closely with a major aerospace manufacturer. Keep in mind there is not a University based in the community, but the Land Grant placed a PHD program there.

This community created 2X more startups than any other city in the state.

This community shot up 26 spots on the best performing cities list to number 4.

This community helped create 740 jobs in the robotics sector.

This community is the birthplace of hundreds of patents around robotics.

This community is the first place in the world to pass a law promoting the free and no permit required use of public lands by private corporations for robotics research and development.

This community is the number 2 city in America for starting new companies just behind Bolder, Colorado.

This community was a manufacturing, mining and timber town. This community didn't see higher education as a priority. This community now celebrates a bright future in a growing industry because a few leaders were bold enough to say... let's see what happens and acknowledge that the machines they used in the industries of the past could maybe map to the billions of dollars going into robotics.

Picture of Success

Once you and the community you are rallying have settled on an initial version of the BETTER Story, then it is time to translate that into a specific result/set of results to achieve. This is called the Picture of Success and it will act as a roll-out plan for a localized version of programming and our Story Stack® to help residents start to tell their BETTER Story; as well as a practical budget and potential sources of funding to make it all happen. This is an example of "this is winning" for the community.

When applying it to a city it will encompass:

- the development of a grassroots start-up ecosystem or a "creator engine" based on a clear and compelling "vertical"

- local venture investment fund(s)

- downtown innovation campuses to drive sustained growth and sustainability

Framework

There are many approaches to create shared images of a preferred future and how to get there. Our approach is to clarify the community's story, strategy and road to success.

This involves focusing on the What, Why, How, Who and When.

- **What** - The specific goals we want to achieve are ...

- **Why** - The specific benefits of achieving these goals will be ...

- **How** - The specific strategies we aim to follow to achieve the goals are ...

- **Who** - The specific responsibilities of the various people in working towards achieving the goals will be ...

- **When** - The specific things that will be happening – and when -along the road towards achieving the goals will be...

There is a link to a template Picture of Success in the Additional Resources section, or you can reach out to our team for a sample.

BETTER in Action:

Are you saying we are old?

In a community that has nearly 2x per capita the amount of senior citizens than any other city in the state... you need to take notice of that as a superpower, a resource, or at the very least... something interesting to integrate into a picture of success.

When the picture of success rolled out, the joke became... Are you saying we are old?

At first, it was a light-hearted joke that was about a newly discovered and very real superpower, in a time when longevity and lifespan were and still are becoming high value industries. For example, AARP calls it the "Grey Wave" that is coming for retirement. A tsunami of aging folks who want something better and more and are absolutely ready to spend lots of money on living well as they age.

Fast forward, the economic development groups, community college, and startup scene has rallied in such a way that the largest cancer center in the country is being built there, AARP sourced their top innovation of the year from a startup pitch day in the community, Steve Jobs roommate

from college and employee #1 at Apple, Inc participated in a Rethinking Retirement Homes Hackathon because he wants a "Jimmy Buffet" meets "Maker Space" retirement home, and the staff members for the United States Senator on the Aging and Longevity Committee attended a multi-day festival focused on the future of longevity in the town.

A good and clear picture of success gives a big tent vision for all to rally around. May you be bold enough to create a picture of success that inspires your community to come alive.

A couple of things to note.

You can choose different time frames, but in our experience, true sustained momentum and transformation of a town or city takes three or more years, so that is where we tend to set our sights. Does change begin to happen sooner, yes, but sustainability takes time.

It is good to tailor a Picture of Success to different audiences. Initially, we write it for key stakeholders/clients. This will ensure everybody knows the shared goal. Later, when asked, we adapt the presentation – while staying true to its spirit – so that it resonates with the wider community.

While you could write the presentation by yourselves, it is important to involve other key people at various stages. This will give ownership in terms of shaping the future and begin to build the team. Where time allows, this is the route we always prefer to take and you should too.

While there are different templates, we like to focus on the three P's of Profit, Product and People - the $$$, structural and social changes we hope to see; as it helps ensure a balanced approach to success.

Local Programming

As you'll discover in the next section, showcasing the wins and effort on a sustained basis is a key ingredient to delivering a community's Picture of Success, and our Story Stack® programming is the best way of doing this.

That is why, once a community has clarified their BETTER Story®, Picture of Success, and a practical roll-out roadmap (next section), it is good to imagine what the first six to twelve months of programming might look like. Who would talk, where would the events be held, what might the topics be, how might they be promoted. This is more for illustration purposes so a community can understand the nature of telling their BETTER Story® in a way that builds over time and allows everyone to imagine themselves participating in the vision.

Budgeting + Financing

Lastly, as part of painting a community's Picture of Success, we work with stakeholders/clients to budget what it would take to deliver on the plan, and how they might finance it.

Every community is different, but costs generally fall into similar categories - time for the local event coordinator, venue costs, communications support etc., plus investment or support regarding the development or activation of a downtown innovation campus, the leadership programming experiences, and local venture investment fund(s).

While we always find that local businesses will give generously, it is better to "hope for the best" and "plan for the worst". This way, stakeholders/clients have a full picture of what is required to build a

strong and vibrant ecosystem over three plus years that has the best chance at achieving a sustainable and dominate flywheel effect.

Then, we share how, in our experience, we have funded activations so that local stakeholders/clients can explore potential avenues for starting the funding as well as ongoing revenue streams to develop and work towards.

Together, this gives stakeholders/clients a financial plan to present to additional funders that delivers against that positive future state, in a way that involves a limited initial commitment, as opposed to the ongoing asks that many non-profit efforts find themselves in. No on likes to pass the hat forever and hope that donations come in.

Key Takeaways:

- To craft a BETTER Story, our approach maps community strengths, growth industry needs, and stakeholder/client goals.

- It then helps paint a Picture of Success and a roadmap of how to get there.

- It is good to work with your community to imagine what the first 6-12 months of programming would look like using the Story Stack®.

- Work with stakeholders/clients to budget what it would take to deliver, and how you might go about financing it.

Suggested Actions

- Specifically for your community, who are the key positive leaders in your city, town, or neighborhood - those that represent a wider group of people, might have capital or con-

nections, but as importantly, care about the future of your community? Once you've identified them, ask others, and expand the list. Then try and put yourself in their shoes and think about how you might approach them when the time comes. Maybe even host a coffee meeting or dinner with a small group of them to "float the idea".

- Think of times you felt most proud of your community and why. What made you feel your town or city was special? What was it known for that people still talk about today? What would you list as its strengths? What are the sneaky hidden super powers of your community?

- Think about what is happening outside of your community. What are some of the needs that big companies have right now and in the future? What are they trying to accomplish and figure out?

- When you look at those three areas, is there an overlap? Where might there be an opportunity to build on these strengths in a way that meets the needs of industry in your state, country or beyond? If you need others to help you work this out, who amongst the people you know could you sit with to explore further? Think about people from your town and city that moved away and have successful careers elsewhere or those that may have come back.

- How might you work with key stakeholders/clients to paint a picture of what success looks like in three or five years time? What would you, as a group, like to see happening then, why would it matter, how would you get there, who needs to do what and what will be happening when, so you know you're on track.

- Now... who within your community might be interested in helping you craft the plan? Who would fund what, and what would they need to say "yes"? How could you test the water and get their support to secure the funding you need?

Chapter 8

Second, Success Showcase

Lessons Learned:

Communities are desperate for more positive social gatherings, ones led by the community itself, where individuals can find hope for the future and a constructive outlet for their energy.

Look, trivia nights at the pub are fun and who doesn't love the occasional karaoke night, parade, or concert in the park... but can we please get more gatherings that offer inspiration and steps toward building the tomorrow we are all seeking, the kind of events that motivate you to tackle a vision so big that it feels like a giant and majestic beast of a mountain ready for you and your friends to ascend as you dream of standing on the summit... a purpose larger than you! Experiences that encourage people to set goals, not just for personal gain, but goals aligned with a vision of contributing REAL beauty and value to the community and world.

We need that and we need that now!

Events like these are crucial in anyones journey of life. They remind us that progress thrives on continuous learning and the collective wisdom of our neighbors. For many people, the last time they experienced anything similar to what I'm writing about is at summer camp, in high school or college! Currently, loneliness and depression

is overwhelming us and we can fight back by building friendships with a shared commitment to a brighter tomorrow. Together, we can kick ass and reach new heights as we build connections around building better products and lives.

In a culture that often fixates on comparison and consumption, social gatherings like we describe in the next section can become a lifeline, a glimpse of what can be, something that others can participate in that is actively creating a sense of belonging and fostering community wide positivity. These experiences inspire personal development and celebrate growth, nurturing a supportive community that pushes each other toward greatness as we set goals bigger than each of us that acts as a forcing factor to build positive and helpful friendships. By acknowledging local wins and learning from the struggles, we celebrate progress and empower everyone to do the good work of chasing their dreams, learning the skills, living in a way that brings purpose passion, and pride as we all climb together toward the mountain top.

As we dive into this section, you may be feeling:

1. Overwhelmed and ready to curl up in a ball thinking we are asking too much of you... remember... Your friends, co-workers, and neighbors also want something better and are willing and likely wanting to help. Don't do this alone... and fyi you can't because they're community events so chill out and read on.

2. So excited to get started that you want to stop reading the rest of the book because you are shaking like an excited puppy at the idea of starting a movement of human flourishing... if this is you ... chill out and read on.

I promise the lessons and frameworks next will be invaluable to you as you start to create lasting change and a movement in your community.

Break it down:

Showcasing success or highlighting the wins and progress on a consistent basis is a key ingredient to delivering a community's Picture of Success or also known as a big, sexy, awesome, incredible, fantastic, vision.

By using the framework of our ongoing events and training program called the Story Stack® you can experience a harmony of human centered design and economics to create the rituals and routines to move people from discovering their BETTER Story or positive core; dreaming of what could be for the town and themselves; to providing them with the tools and support to successfully design and deliver on those dreams. The BETTER Story and goals will be unique to each community or clients... the system or stack to showcase success is the exact same.
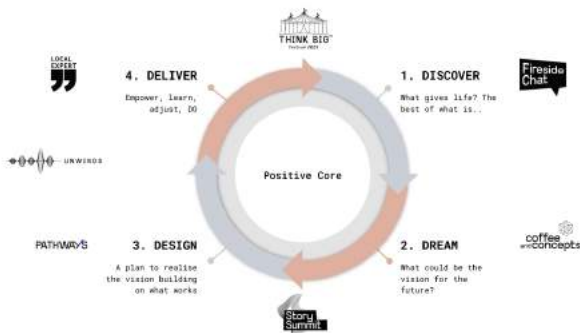
The "Strengths Theory Flywheel" with BETTER programming created by Innovation Collective

That is why we generally include the schedule for delivery of our events and programming formats in a community's Picture of Success. We have tried, tested, and adjusted our approach for ten years to deliver the best results and in that process we developed a series of manuals,

softwares, support features, and training modules around them, but communities can create their own or adjust ours according to their needs.

Story Stack ®

Our approach is a system that builds over time, with each event, experience, and program serving a distinct purpose in the transformation of a community. The method follows the appreciative inquiry process as described back in Chapter 4 Our Approach. Below is a quick overview of the event rhythm we use. We will get into details for each one a bit later on in this chapter.

For the first six months, we usually launch with monthly story telling nights called Fireside Chats and then we transition to bi-monthly Coffee & Concepts experiences to give people within a community with connections built on inspiration and confidence in shared curiosity and ideas again. We all need a crew to dream with.

Those experiences are then followed by Story Summits that happen once every 3-6 months and are designed to encourage people to find their new gear, and out of the Story Summit we launch the Leadership Pathways and Local Experts to create the structured space and time to help individuals start to do the work in a focused and accountable way on their specific personal and professional goals.

Last, we put together Think Big Festival, think SXSW in your community and around the vertical you picked, which usually happens 12 to 18 months after the events and experiences begin and is a crucial piece to get industry to buy in more and more and for the wider audience of the town to believe in the amazing machine you are building.
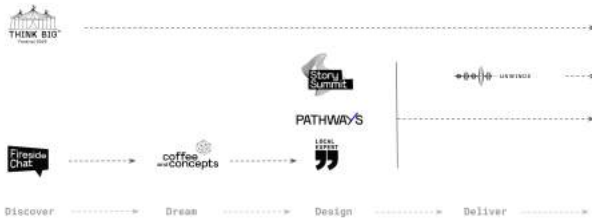
Visual layout of BETTER programming and phases they address

From a cadence perspective post launch, our event and programming pyramid ranges from an annual celebration of the town's BETTER Story - Think Big Festival; quarterly Story Summit retreats; monthly Fireside Chats and Local Experts with bi-weekly Coffee & Concepts; weekly Leadership Pathway sprints; and a 24/7 online digital community where members can encourage and support each other and meet up whenever they want to or need.

Don't forget.... these formats are built using world class principles from psychology and have been merged with the structure and rhythm that has created some of the most powerful economies in the world. There is a structure and specific sequence of dance moves which, if followed, delivers success... So let's dance baby!!!

Our Story Stack can be rolled out by a part-time individual we call the Community Lead, a role similar to an event coordinator, curator, startup communities leader, or party host. We will talk more about the wider team later in the Stakeholder Stack® section.
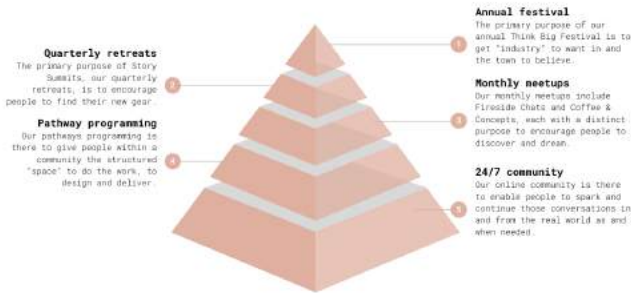
The "City-as-a-Incubator" programming pyramid. A visual of how to create a 24/7 creative community that acts as an ongoing percolator of growth and connection.

Formats

Below is an overview of the various event and programming formats we deploy to showcase success.

Fireside Chats

The primary purpose of a Fireside Chat is to gather the town together to experience inspiration because they learn about the incredible stories of what people in their community are doing and that the journey they have been on.

They are monthly, one and half hour events, usually held in the evenings 6:00-7:30 pm the second Wednesday of every month, where people get a chance to learn from local leaders, often overlooked, and meet like-minded individuals in a super casual and fun setting. Anyone can attend and there is always a free / bootstrap option so that

there is literally no barrier to entry. All you have to do is show up and in life... that is half the battle.

The experiences follow four key principles -

1. celebrate local- there is more happening under your nose than you know.

2. gather the nerds- we are all a bit different and this is the time to celebrate our wild, curious, fun, nerdy sides.

3. observe and grow- sit back, relax, ask questions, absorb the wisdom from your local community and let your brain expand.

4. show a better tomorrow, today- in a dark world it sure is nice to be in a room with positive people listening to and telling stories about doing the hard work to build a better life, family, invention, company, city, etc.

Now, there are a lot of small details to how to design these experiences, how to host the events, execute the marketing, what questions to ask, and more so that Fireside Chats can be maximized, but this is enough to get you started in the right direction. Remember the most important thing here is to begin inspiring a community as it begins the journey of flourishing as creators and shifts the culture toward that awesome incredible, brilliant fun, shining vision. If you want more help or support, we host a quarterly webinar on delivering the Story Stack®. Reach out at info@innovationcollective.co to sign up for the next webinar and learn to deliver an inspiring and transformative Story Stack® in your own community. If you'd like to dive in even more, we do provide the marketing tools, support manual, project management software, experience templates, and reporting tools to cohorts of community leaders across the world who are using this methodology. You

can inquire about that as well or... just make it up on your own and have a blast knowing you are in the right direction and we are cheering you on!!!

Better in Action:

"Are you sure you want me?"

There is something powerful about being asked to tell your story of your career in front of a room of your peers.

"Are you sure you want me?"

That is what the local founder of a holster making company said. Not just any holster making company, but at the time it was the #1 selling holsters in America.

He started it in his kitchen in Alabama. He used a George Foreman Grill to create his first prototypes. And yet... he felt like he had a story no one would care about and in fact... locally no one was telling his story to the community.

Through him telling that story, it built partnerships for him with other local manufacturers, and he is now a board member of a $50 million startup that uses ai and robotics in the manufacturing safety industry that found him at that meeting. That company even rents space in his facility for shared manufacturing knowledge.

Having a space to hear the stories of success, struggle, and mistakes of leaders in town is crucial. It builds connective tissue between people who care about the town and want to add value to the future. May you be bold enough to begin telling the stories of the residents of the place you call home in a way that inspires the community to build together.

Picture of the community gathering to hear the stories during a fireside chat.

Coffee & Concepts

The primary purpose of Coffee & Concepts is to encourage people to get their "crazy" ideas out of their heads, into the real world, with others that want to help.

> As a "side note", have you realized yet that what we are building together is a culture where human curiosity and the drive to invent, create, and make is at the core? It is the one thing that bonds us all... we are creators and we all have those magic moments, a spark of an idea, a way we believe we can make something in the world BETTER. Building the social infrastructure of your community around this and aligning it with big-

ger and very real economic goals is a wild win win win.

Now... back to coffee and concepts.

They are bi-weekly, one hour and fifteen minute events, usually held early mornings 7:30 am to 8:45 am on either side of Fireside Chats, usually on the first and third Wednesday of each month. They are events where people can learn about interesting global and local tech news that aligns with the vertical focus, be around people who are building ideas they can be a part of and help with; and get help or feedback on new inventions or products you are thinking about. Anyone can attend and they are free.

They follow three key principles-

1. the emperor may have clothes- each innovation, product, invention, or idea should be heard because real innovation is truly nonsense and in life we have many people telling us why things won't work. Let this space become a place of curiosity, experiments, validation, empathy

2. give help, get help- the format is a give first mentality but also don't be too proud to ask for help or share your crazy big idea.

3. hear ye! hear ye!- the experiences become a town positive gossip column. Literally it becomes the buzz about all the good things happening and a space to share positive events happening.

These principles are around the concept of gathering a community to collaborate, share their ideas, dream big, and connect with others who share their excitement. There are a million small details to how these can be maximized just like Fireside Chat. If you want more

help or support, we host a quarterly webinar on delivering the Story Stack®. Reach out at info@innovationcollective.co to sign up for the next webinar and learn to deliver an inspiring and transformative Story Stack® in your own community. If you'd like to dive in even more, we do provide the marketing tools, support manual, project management software, experience templates, and reporting tools to cohorts of community leaders across the world who are using this methodology. You can inquire about that as well or... just make it up on your own and have a blast knowing you are in the right direction and we are cheering you on!!!

A sketch drawing made during a coffee and concepts showcasing the need to get our ideas out of our heads

Better in Action:

"I could print you a Batman Suit out of carbon fiber, custom made for you and your body, destroy it, and then reprint it exactly the same way or as something else if my idea works."

That was the statement made by the young man in the corner during the concept sharing portion of coffee and concepts. At first, he explained the technical specifications, the specific tensile strengths he was sure he could achieve, and what it would change for the industry, but then someone in the room asked, "what could you make that I would care about or understand?"

"I could print you a Batman Suit out of carbon fiber, custom made for you and your body, destroy it, and then reprint it exactly the same way or as something else if my idea works."

At that point, he had the interest of the room. "So you can't print carbon fiber this way now?"

"No."

"So you think you could and if you can invent this that it is something new that prints carbon fiber into free space and would be a big and important change for the industry?"

"Yes."

"What do you need to figure this out?"

"I need a motion control expert, an ultraviolet light expert, and money for a patent."

"Does anyone know someone who can help him?"

Hands go up. Within minutes, he had all he needed as introductions. A kind benefactor and believer gave him $15,000 as a grant for his patent, a local motion control shop gave him a job where he could work 50% of the time as a shop assistant and 50% on his project, and a retired expert in lighting, electrical engineering and cameras helped him with the UV questions.

Fast forward, this is a company now worth over $100M transforming the manufacturing industry, employing many local people with high paying jobs and, more importantly, is an example that overlooked people in overlooked places have big ideas that matter... even if they haven't proved it yet. Remember, the emperor may have clothes and keep in mind... no one in that room understood exactly what he was talking about at first but were willing to help him chase a dream he believed in once, through relationship he was willing to explain.

Community gatherings that allow for residents to get ideas out of their heads are important. At the very least, it solves loneliness. At the best, it creates multi million dollar companies, incredible jobs, inspiration to try, and a hunger to learn.

Story Summits

The primary purpose of Story Summits is to encourage people to find their new gear.

They happen every three to six months, over a day and a half, usually Friday night and Saturday afternoon/evening. They are events where people can be mentored by powerful leaders from outside of the community, while also taking a few extra hours to pause and "audit" their life. A community that gathers to learn from legends as they also ask and explore the hard question, "how am I treating the people closest to me?" "am I really giving my best self to my work?" "is it time for me

to embark on my next growth phase in life?", and many more critical questions we often don't make time for.

These are designed to serve people who have signed up as members and for each of them to bring a plus 1 or people specifically invited by the Community Lead (more on this later). If a Community Lead invites someone, they are usually people looking to join or key community stakeholders. Tickets for members are free and do include the plus one. Standard tickets are priced at a 30-50% premium on top of the cost of quarterly membership to incentivize joining the crew vs. just coming in for the awesome summits. This pushes the community toward a commitment mentality and provides one of the paths to sustainability.

They follow three key principles -

1. learn from legends- it is time to bring in the big guns. You'd be surprised who would come to mentor at a Story Summit.

2. recalibrate & launch- it is a moment to pause, ponder, and then push again.

3. nerd family reunion- life is busy and we all need a good block of time to catch up with the people we love.

The principles of a Story Summit are around the concept of gathering a community to build deeper connections together, learn business and life lessons from legends, and set intentional goals for their future. There are so many more small details to how these can be maximized and executed awesomely to be a key piece in the process of inspiring a community to begin its journey of flourishing and start shifting the culture. If you want more help or support, we host a quarterly webinar on delivering the Story Stack®. Reach out at <u>info@innovationcollective.co</u> to sign up for the next webinar and learn to deliver an

inspiring and transformative Story Stack® in your own community. If you'd like to dive in even more, we do provide the marketing tools, support manual, project management software, experience templates, and reporting tools to cohorts of community leaders across the world who are using this methodology. You can inquire about that as well or... just make it up on your own and have a blast knowing you are in the right direction and we are cheering you on!!!

Better in Action x 2... meaning you get two stories this time and if you pay attention you will notice that they tip you off to two of the experiences we design into the Story Summits. Remember... there are 5 experiences across the day and a half:

"THIS MATTERS"

I'll never forget the sight of her in her wheelchair, with a legendary mechanical engineer, known for their work with one of the Microsoft founders, saying, "I'll help you for free because this matters."

Story Summits have a crucial role, not only in offering renowned leaders the chance to mentor and give back by sharing their life and business stories, but also in providing local individuals with the confirmation that their creations matter beyond their town's borders. This particular story involves a woman recently hospitalized due to a stroke. Like many stroke survivors, she lost the use of half her body and felt embarrassed and demoralized as nurses assisted her with showers. Lying in her hospital bed, she began thinking about how to solve this problem. While she had never considered herself an inventor, she had started attending Innovation Collective events with her son, which changed her perspective.

Instead of feeling helpless, she decided to create something that didn't exist: a telescoping and modular shower head that would enable her to take her own showers, even with the use of just one hand.

She made the bold choice to participate in the startup pitch segment of the Story Summit, known as "Show and Tell". This wasn't merely a contest, but a moment for local creators to showcase their works in progress, allowing the community to celebrate their efforts and ask questions. Her husband rolled her wheelchair onto the stage, where she shared her story with her town and the distinguished leaders we had brought in. The response was incredible—multiple colleges offered to assist with her designs, and a world-class engineer who had flown in from thousands of miles away walked up to her and said, "I will help you for free because this matters."

Fast forward, she has her provisional patent and continuously refines her designs.

Story Summits consistently provide an incredible and enduring boost to the community engaged in this work. When a town comes together to learn, celebrate, laugh, and grow as one, the positive energy becomes contagious.

"I CAN FIX IT"

At the end of each Story Summit, we encourage communities to host a dinner that we call "The Becoming Feast". Think church potluck meets tribal ceremony. After all the experiences of the Story Summit have happened, we close out the event with each participant grabbing a plate of food and sitting down in a large circle. One by one each participant of the Story Summit stands up and declares 4 things that they have also written down on their "Becoming Statements" card.

- *What inspired you this weekend?*

- *Over the next three months, who do you want to focus on becoming or what do you want to work on creating that you believe will add the most beauty and value to the world?*

- *What do you want us to hold you accountable to?*

- *Which of the leadership Pathway groups do you want to join to support you in that journey?*

Each and every time I've observed one of these sacred gatherings, it is something powerful!

On one occasion, I had the honor to watch a member who owns a private jet charter company stand up for his declarations. Many of you would expect CEO's, creatives, and entrepreneurs to declare projects about making money, launching new products, etc but you'd be amazed... Most often people focus on the "who they are becoming"; character based declarations.

In this specific instance, there he stood. Reminiscing about how inspired he was by the Story Summit and the leaders who shared about the fact that they make their families a priority. He then pivoted to how he believed he didn't give his sons the best he could have when they were young. He mourned the fact that they were now older. Then, he boldly declared that he is going to do what he can to fix it. The Becoming Statement was simple, "I'm becoming a better father to my grown sons and I want you to hold me accountable to writing my sons a letter about the past and the future I want to build."

Building a strong economy is not only about businesses and products, it is about the character and good goals of the leaders you are unleashing on the community and world.

Pathways

The primary purpose of the Leadership Pathways is to give people within a community the structured space to do the work; to design

and deliver together. This is not only about unlocking the professional and technical skills you need but also refining and learning personal growth skills to assist you in becoming the kind of person who can achieve your goal.

The pathways are launched coming out of Story Summits as a premium offering and are designed to drive growth in key areas of an entrepreneur's life through interactive group sessions over an eight week period.

- Explore is not your average book club. We curate books, essays, poems, and papers that will unlock curiosity, teach skills, deepen thoughts all in service of helping to expand ideas and knowledge that move to action. Members meet weekly to discuss the book and the growth from the readings. Often we will meet with the authors for a national q and a to support the cohort members.

- Great 8 is a weekly experience designed to be a series of conversations that walk through eight core areas of life. This is intended to help participants evaluate key areas that are important in life, how they interact with them now and wish they could in the future as they take control of their life. The eight categories are vision, health, relationships, money, self talk, work ethic, community investment and fun.

- Studio is a creative business model canvas experience where participants develop their ideas, learn from leaders, discuss with their community, and get mentored by people who are changing the world.

- WERC is a sprint where community members self reflect on what they are becoming and what they need training in for success towards that. Then, they select and complete a course

to gain or sharpen that specific skill(s) with the support and accountability of their peers in weekly check in sessions designed around learner support.

Better in Action:

"She won't marry me"

Each of us have different motivations for why we want to become or create a better future. One of my favorite stories is about a young inventor who had a brilliant idea but couldn't get it off the ground.

Due to his inability to turn the idea into action, his girlfriend saw him as "unsettled" and wouldn't commit to a long term relationship with him. He was frustrated because not only did he believe in the idea, but he wanted to build a future with her.

He joined Studio to take his project to the next level. During the pathway, he realized he needed a patent. The leader of his group knew a local inventor who loved ideas like this young man had. He introduced the two of them and sure enough the inventor made a small investment into the young man's idea so he got the patent protection for his concept and more importantly he gained confidence which acted as wind in his sails. After the pathway was over, he began developing prototypes and then proved his product could work. He began pitching investors in the community and he received the funding he needed to begin turning his invention into a real business.

Fast forward, this focused sprint and the support of his peers from the Pathway not only helped him create a company that has transformed an industry, but he is now happily married to his then girlfriend... and they have kids!

We need gatherings that help of focus, hold us accountable, and encour-
age us to spend time on meaningful things instead of wallowing in our
"could have" or "should have's".

Think Big Festival

The primary purpose of the Think Big Festival is to get industry to
want in and the community to believe. Ya know, get everyone to Think
BIG and help the BIG industry players to see your community as BIG
THINKERS and DOERS who are working hard on the future of
their industry.

It happens once a year over 2-3 days. They are events where people can
see and hear about the future of innovations from the people creating
them while meeting new friends. The event has ticketed portions and
free portions for the city; members always get VIP tickets with special
access to speakers and more.

The Think Big Festival produces an industry think tank, street fair,
speaker series, pitch party, and an innovation awards ceremony that
sparks excitement across the community. In many ways, it is the equiv-
alent of the county fair, but for community creativity and innovation
instead of livestock and the Gravitron.

They follow four key principles -

1. gather the players- bring together and highlight not only
   locals but also the big names in the industry.

2. put on your Sunday Best- it is your communities moment to
   shine! Have fun and go big!

3. play matchmaker- while you have the big hitters in town,
   be sure to connect them to the schools and startups that

are interesting and aligned with their innovation and talent needs.

4. this dog will hunt- when the festival is over you and all those who participated begin to realize... this is real... this is very real.

Better in Action:

"Innovation is Everywhere"

There was something magical about seeing a senior citizen who invented a robot, a fortune 100 global head of innovation and a tech reporter from WSJ all walk down a dock together as they headed for a boat that they would go out on for a ride.

To give more backstory, the senior citizen is from a small town and is the founder of a company that was trying to create a robot that would forever change an industry if it was "viable". The industry experts said it wasn't but it didn't deter this man and his family. Together they saw the need for it and pursued the "nonsensical idea" anyway. After years of attending coffee and concepts and other events he was proud to announce his working prototype. He had also received funding from local investors to begin to scale the company.

Seeing the value that he was creating, the local community lead began asking IC to help connect him to larger industry partners who might benefit from the product. To the local lead's surprise, our mentor network was able to introduce one of the largest players in the industry who wanted to come see the product in action. To make this happen, the company would fly out the head of innovation to speak on a panel at Think Big Festival and then take time to go see the robot in between events. That way the big company got a chance to support a community but also do some business development for innovation.

Seeing the opportunity, the local community lead also asked for a big time journalist who could facilitate the panel. Once again, the mentor network was able to help again and a tech reporter from WSJ offered to join as the panel host and to speak at the festival.

Now, who benefited from this panel? The town is sure to hear about the future of an industry and how locals are trying to add value to it. Keep in mind, the industry innovation focus for this town was in robotics, so this was an extra special moment.

Fast forward, this company became the #1 most talked about technology at all of CES, has won multiple industry awards, and to this day, the head of innovation from that big brand still comes out to the events as a way to support the communities and maybe find another breakthrough idea and just be a part of the journey.

Image of two boys at the Think Big Festival Tech Carnival trying Virtual Reality for the first time as they explore one the United States Nuclear Energy National Lab.

WSJ Journalist, head of innovation and Walmart, and local robotics company discussing the future of automation and grocery industry.

Local innovator receiving the "Burt Rutan Confidence in Nonsense Award" for having the craziest idea that actually has turned into a company. The award is Burt Rutan's ear and sideburn bronzed. Burt is the founder of the first private company to fly to space and back multiple times in a week.

Image of a Think Big Festival speaker who was the world's first recipient of a mind controlled robotic arm thanks to Johns Hopkins APL meeting local members of the IC community.

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Local Experts

The aim of Local Experts is to help teach the tactical skills it takes to build a healthy life and company or product. Consider it a free hour of consulting by members for members.

These usually happen in the evening, 60 minutes, the fourth Tuesday of the month.

To help a community get the most out of Local Experts, we recommend the leads get all the "pitch stuff", who are you, what's your business, etc. out of the way at the beginning and make it fun / different. Then pivot into the members peppering the expert with real life questions they need help with.

Image of a local expert event at a local restaurant. Standing room only and host on top of bar.

BETTER In Action:

"Your second nature is *someone's greatest fear..."*

The power of community is *that where you are weak, others are strong. Remember, the key to what we are building here is a strong, vibrant, well rounded community who is on a journey together to help each other achieve great goals that transform a community.*

As he took the microphone and began explaining how to understand the stock markets, the types of savings accounts, and how to buy bonds you could see the pens writing swiftly on the note pads.

You'd think entrepreneurs would understand financial planning or feel comfortable with money, but when the local expert, a financial planner and bank board member, asked the crowd of 150 how many people felt like they understood money, two hands went up... two hands.

This was an incredible opportunity for a local who has such wisdom to share something that he feels like everyone knows... but obviously they don't.

For the next 6 months, the local expert was sharing story after story of people who after attending that meeting had told him about how they opened investment accounts, started saving for the first time, learned how to budget, etc.

Sometimes it is nice to have a friendly face take the stage and share the wisdom they have. You know them as "so and so", but don't forget that everyone in town has a superpower to share.

Unwinds

The aim of Unwinds is to give a community space and time to come together, unwind, check in and ask each other "how are you doing". Nothing more. Nothing less.

These generally happen in the evening, on the last Friday of the month.

We just find a spot in town - a park, backyard, office space or bar with a discount - to get people to bring their own beer / buy their own. Sometimes, we also just join another event that is happening... It is just a gathering. Think of it like a running club going for a beer.

Promotion

How communities promote events and programming can vary, but what we have found to work best is spotting and sharing success stories; and taking these messages, and often our events, to where the audience is, and inviting them "in". Remember, local news loves to tell stories with heart and they need things to cover.

Success stories could include...

- The Fireside Chat that just passed

- A creator in the community who just started their business

- A big name speaker coming to the community

- A new product being launched

- A youth (with parental permission) who has engaged in entrepreneurship

...then layer information about upcoming events and the benefits of our programming.

As we believe in the potential of all people, we strive particularly hard to ensure everyone is and feels welcome at our events, and that to-

gether, they have the opportunity to grow and contribute as valuable members of their community.

To help make sure that happens, our approach to making our communities inclusive is to find champions, host intro events together, bring events to where our audience feels comfortable, and acknowledge and celebrate inclusion.

Pop Up

Pop-Up Dens are a third-space created within a community, usually within the first 18 months. A physical place where people can get together, but not yet a permanent location. One that will act as a temporary sacred space where people can show up to work, read books, play board games, or just unwind with their fellow members. Think of it as a "Creators Country Club" or a modern version of the Chamber of Commerce building designed for the knowledge economy.

It is the "place" where members and their friends have a sacred zone with creative energy, and acts as an additional layer of value to premium membership and sustainability.

It can be really any space. A basement, an attic, a random empty storefront, an underutilized art gallery, the back area of a hotel, the options of under activated spaces in cities are endless. Having it be authentic and activated/built together as a community is important. The goal is to have the use of the space be in exchange for just the cost of utilities. The community cleans it up, helps with light fixtures, paint, etc. Setting it up and cleaning it, painting it, furnishing it, should all be a community activity. Why? Because then we all have a connection and feeling of ownership in it together. Having co-ownership in the

process makes people proud to be a part of it. We want them to enter and think "that's my lamp", that's my old desk, I painted that wall.

Patent attorney with 47 years of experience teaching members about patent basics in a pop up den. Experts like this live in every community.

Image of a basement pop up den with donated tables and chairs. This space was abandoned and never used.

When activating a space, look for locations that could benefit from a cleaned up space, community awareness, and new energy/foot traffic. An example of this, would be having a slow art gallery become a new pop up den space and utilizing the empty basement. The events hosted there should always highlight the opportunity to buy art and when appropriate include artists and/or the owner and their customers in the events. The events and use of space don't need to be extractive, they can be additive.

These Pop Up Dens are an important way of showcasing success both to the community, to each other, as well as to residents of a community, stakeholders and potential investors in a more permanent space. It gives them a project to work on together, to show that they can truly create something.

Clubhouse

Even our permanent spaces, clubhouses or Innovation Dens, as we like to call them, are all designed to showcase success and encourage the community to discover, dream, design and deliver.

They are purposefully located in high-traffic areas and layer light-retail (eg coffee or barber shops) to attract footfall, visibility of co-working so people see others putting in the work, some form of R&D showcase that aligns with the BETTER Story, plus offices and an exclusive membership space to give visibility of those who have had success, and importantly, connecting them with others starting out.

Image of the 100+ year old abandoned building being brought back to life as a space to gather all the companies and activity created by the Better process

Image of coworking space and offices being built into an Innovation Den by team members of IC Rebuild.

Key Takeaways:

- Showcasing success on a sustained basis is key to delivering a community's Picture of Success.

- Our Story Stack is designed to create the rituals and routines to move people from discovering their BETTER Story; dreaming of what could be; to designing and delivering on those dreams.

- It builds over time, with each event and program serving a distinct purpose in the transformation of a community.

- Promotion is about spotting and sharing success stories; and taking these messages, and often the events, to where the audience is, and inviting them "in".

- Pop Up Dens showcase success both to the community, to each other, as well as to residents of a community, stakeholders and potential investors in a more permanent space.

- Permanent spaces, clubhouses or Innovation Dens, should be designed to showcase success and encourage the community to discover, dream, design and deliver.

Suggested Actions

- Where in your community do people go to now in the evening? What would be a nice place for a family dinner or reunion? Could you envision hosting an evening speaker event there that people feel comfortable just "dropping into" to check out what is going on? Make a list of these places. There are usually two or three. Speak to the owners... would they give the room for an early evening mid-week event where you might purchase a few drinks?

- Who are those people in your community that have been successful? What is their story? Are there any that had a particularly interesting journey that you know of? Make a list of these people and figure out a plan to approach three or four to see if they'd be willing to tell their story to others of an evening, to pass on their wisdom.

- List the coffee shops or other venues people go to in the morning, where people pop in and pop out, where sometimes people might sit with their laptop to do some work. Is there a corner to host 10 to 15 people comfortably for a conversation? Make a list.

- Of those people you listed for the Fireside Chats, who do they know out of town that are movers and shakers in their industry? Would they be willing to invite them to a weekend retreat where they share their knowledge, catch up with each other, have some fun and meet some amazing people?

- Who are the business experts in your community - the wizard marketers, attorneys, financial planners, etc? Make a list and figure out who you think might give an hour of their time and advice for free in return for sitting in front of and meeting a room of 20 plus entrepreneurs and business owners.

- Where do business owners and budding entrepreneurs currently hang out? Is there a local chamber, a college, a school, a coffee shop? What is the local paper they flick through, the shop they go to that has a notice board, the school they send their kids to? Those are the places you can go and speak at, put up posters, hand out flyers for your events.

- Lastly, where are the empty buildings downtown that people walk past and wish something was in there - the empty shop or bar, where there once was a gallery or grocery store. Who owns these buildings? These are the people that might loan you the venue for a pop up clubhouse later on down the line. Get to know them, invite them in as stakeholders, explain what it is you're trying to accomplish.

Chapter 9

Third, Sustained Support

Lessons Learned:

When embarking on a mission to provide lasting value through a creative community, sustainability becomes paramount. It's crucial to understand that sustainability doesn't necessarily equate to turning this role into a full-time job or getting rich off of this effort. Rather, it's about ensuring that the work you are launching endures for the long haul. Sustainability can take various forms, but the key is to seek opportunities to receive value back from the people and places positively impacted by your work and the community's collective efforts.

We often refer to this as value for value. This will manifest in different ways. Members might contribute through small fees or the gifts of their skills to a larger project you are working on and this can be in exchange for granting them varying levels of access to premium events. Owning, renting, or co-owning a building that serves as a hub for coworking, community gatherings, and office space can provide sustainability. Operating a local investment club, assisting local investors in channeling private capital into local small businesses and startups, is another avenue. Some local colleges might recognize the value of your work in generating economic and community impact, leading to demand for further education within the community. It could involve securing contracts from the government to continue the economic

impact work being done. Additionally, certain businesses might be willing to sponsor your efforts, either as preferred employers or to showcase their services.

Most importantly though, the key is to start with the community's needs and efforts, rather than waiting solely for funding as a transaction to get you going. While upfront funding is nice, don't let it be the sole determinant of getting started. Give of your time and creativity first, but plan for a value exchange once you get going. I emphasize this because many remarkable community leaders have burned out because they didn't have a sustainable plan in place. Over time, they may feel they've given so much to the community without a means to receive value in return. Therefore, it's vital not to approach this endeavor with the expectation that it will immediately become a full-time job, but rather to have a well-thought-out plan for realizing and sustaining the value created.

In this next section, you will see a clear approach to planning how to invite key players to help who will directly benefit from your work in building creative communities.

Break it down:

Telling the BETTER Story to stakeholders or potential clients regionally, nationally and globally to build support and investment, so a community can sustain and scale their efforts, is a key ingredient to moving from being on the critical list to becoming a self-sustaining ecosystem.

Understanding the audience, the investors, residents, non-profits, corporations or other stakeholders (ie the market); shaping the narrative appropriately (ie the message); and choosing the right approach (ie the method), helps everyone understand and share the BETTER Story, and assists key stakeholders in realigning pre-existing education,

financial, and economic development resources to support the bottom-up shared vision.
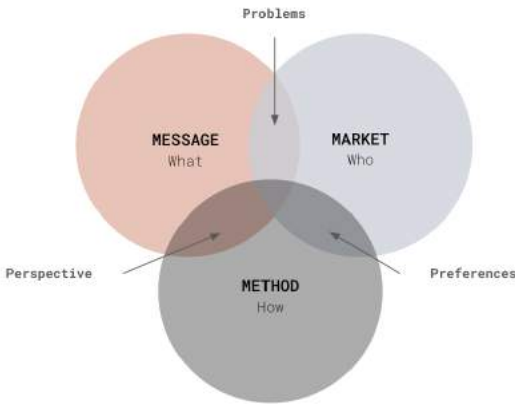
The "BETTER Story" Diagram created by Innovation Collective

To unpack this further, we will first outline the various roles and types of groups we generally work with within a community (ie the market); and then how we tell the BETTER Story (ie the message) and share it (ie the method) to give communities the best chance of success.

Stakeholder or Leadership Stack

Every community we work with is different, but in each there is usually a sponsor or group of sponsors (ie funders or donors); organizations wanting to lend their support (such as the city and nonprofits); plus individuals willing to volunteer their time to help run experiences or programs; plus the event coordinator/curator that we recommend recruiting locally and, most importantly, the residents.

How these groups work together for the benefit of the community is key.

Sponsors

Sponsors (i.e. investors / donors) consist of those people/representatives of organizations who fund the program in a community.

Their role is to provide financial and other resources, ensure everyone is focused on the shared Picture of Success/delivering on the agreement, and give visible and enthusiastic support to the process.

Key is that they are passionate about lifting the community.

In most communities, there are successful business people who want to give back, to see their communities succeed, and, if presented with a potentially viable opportunity to do so, are happy to invest.

Once established, the Community Lead should meet with this group, chaired by one of the investors, for an hour once every three months to report quarterly progress against the Picture of Success, and discuss any additional requirements or adjustments; with a slightly longer meeting to talk through the Annual Report and plan for the year ahead.

In addition, sponsors should receive a monthly executive report, focussed on key highlights, metrics and roadmap.

Success Team

Once the decision is made to sponsor a program within a community, we suggest the formation of a Success Team - a small group of no more than 8 leaders from a broad range of key organizations within the community who want to lend a hand, and may include one or two individual investors who are eager to actively get involved, chaired by the Community Lead.

Team members' role is to communicate the importance of the program to their constituents and wider community, provide additional resources where needed, and use their influence to ensure its success. They are there to support the Community Lead in their efforts.

The Community Lead should meet with this group for an hour once a month to check in on outcomes people committed to the previous month, share successes, highlight challenges and identify specific ways everyone on the team can support the efforts going forward.

Community Team

The Community Team is a group of five to ten people that work with the Community Lead to make it all happen. They help run experiences and programs, assist with outreach, secure corporate sponsorship and a lot more besides.

They are volunteers from different key organizations, at different levels, with different skill sets; all formal or informal leaders from groups whose buy-in is critical to success. They are invited in and coordinated by the Community Lead with the support of the Success Team.

They all have high credibility within the community, strong interpersonal communication and listening skills, strong action and follow-through orientation, understanding of and support for the vision and strategic direction, and value teamwork, participation and cooperation.

They call on the Success Team for resources, checks and balances, input and help.

One or two key leaders, including the Community Lead, should serve on both the Community and Success Team to keep everything coordinated.

The Community Team meets formally once a quarter, more to celebrate successes and plan the next two quarters; and meet informally as needed.

Community Lead

The Community Lead is appointed on behalf of the Sponsors.

They are the front line and face of the program within a given community. They are a connector of resources within a town, the evangelist of the BETTER approach, and the producer and promoter of the events, programs and resources, as laid out.

Their four core areas of responsibilities and duties are to...

1. Successfully produce, promote and deliver the program of experiences including bi-weekly and monthly gatherings, quarterly personal growth and skills development programs, as well as the annual three-day innovation festival.

2. Engage regularly with local individuals within the community to empower them to pursue their dreams.

3. Drive income through membership, ticket sales, corporate partnerships and space rentals to sustain and scale impact into the future.

4. Work with Sponsors, and manage the Success and Community Teams in a positive and professional manner to ensure the community is set up for success.

Support + Sustainability

For a community to move from being on the critical list to becoming a self-sustaining ecosystem takes time, three to five years, no matter how you look to achieve it.

By taking an "inside out" rather than "top down" approach and starting with culture rather than concrete; it is less costly in terms of capital, enables a community to have more agency, and is the quickest way to show success and build belonging built with economic growth in mind.
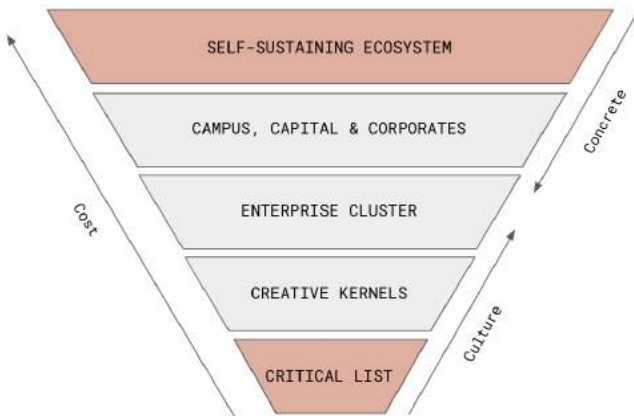
The 5 Levels of a "City-as-an-Incubator" diagram diagram created by Innovation Collective

It also enables a community to finance from within or bootstrap, funders to test and iterate before committing to bigger investments, and together take a staged approach to building support and investment over that period which is what we find works best.

It is obviously important to always acknowledge and celebrate support of any kind, particularly in the form of goodwill and volunteerism. It is the lifeblood of any grassroots community effort.

At the same time, moving from the critical list to becoming a self-sustaining ecosystem takes money - investment to set up and income to sustain. That is why we focus predominantly on financial support, and take a commercial approach to how we communicate (the message and method) with our sponsors. We treat them as we would investors, focus on the return and sustainability, report as if to a Board, and evaluate and de-risk at each stage.

Plan

This phase is about crafting the BETTER Story - strengths mapping the community and painting the Picture of Success. This is usually made possible by a small number of sponsors coming together at the beginning to fund what is a defined and relatively small scale "study".

It is important to note, though, that this phase is also ultimately about, if deemed feasible, making the business case for the initial sponsors and other high net worth individuals to invest in the activation (or not) of the community over three years on the premise that this has the potential to help build a grassroots innovation ecosystem and become self-sustaining during that time period.

For these people, co-investment in the plan will be a relatively small amount. But the potential costs for activation, including the role of Community Lead, training, promotion and programming, may not be.

It is important to consider this as, not just a community plan in terms of how it might be presented, but a commercial endeavor, and to speak

their language, assuming the aim is to deliver success in the form of funding to move forward.

Free

Assuming a community has secured funding for a Community Lead, a role which initially can be part-time, the training and phase one production and promotion of events such as Fireside Chats and Coffee & Concepts do not require significant investment. This next phase is about building the wider community and showcasing success.

It is also about key leaders - particularly local residents and business owners - understanding the value of the programming, which is why we usually have a tip jar at our free events, actively seek sponsorship for them, promote heavily and gather success stories.

It is also about priming demand for the paid leadership community offering, including Story Summits, Pathways, Local Experts and Unwinds, amongst the wider community alongside business owners, universities and other potential paid members.

Paid

Assuming a community has successfully launched the free event formats; evidenced interest through the number of attendees and participation, appetite to support these through sponsorship and demand for paid membership (e.g. wait lists); and the team have secured further funding if staged; the next phase is about successfully building the leadership community towards self-sustainability. We do this by driving paid membership, sponsorship and other donations and support.

This phase is also about building credibility in the group's ability to do this, and to test and validate demand for an innovation campus, particularly in the next phase.

Pop Up

Once a community has evidenced interest in paid programming, the next phase is about giving members a home as outlined above, and thereby testing and validating demand for co-working.

This in turn gives confidence to potential real estate investors and helps build the business case further.

Clubhouse

Development of a permanent clubhouse, or Innovation Den as we like to call it, is a significant investment in the redevelopment of a community. It requires a very different set of skills and approach to funding which is why we have a distinct team that focuses on this.

However a community chooses to develop and fund such a space, it is important to consider it a key ingredient of the overall ecosystem, where community membership is part of access to space and where clubhouse income is used to continue to fund programming and activate the community.

This will not only differentiate the space from others and drive further demand for coworking, it will contribute, alongside membership, sponsorship etc., to the development of the self-sustaining ecosystem the community set out to achieve.
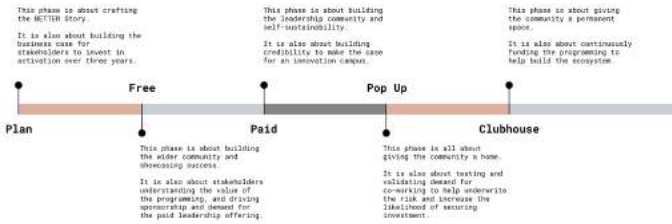
Chart showing BETTER programming and how it can develop into paid programming created by Innovation Collective

Key Takeaways:

- Building support and investment is important so your community can sustain and scale their efforts.

- Understanding the "market" (i.e. stakeholders), "message" (i.e. your narrative) and "method" (i.e. the approach) is key.

- Stakeholders or Leadership Stack includes sponsors, success team, community team and community lead.

- You will need to think about securing support for the plan, free events, paid program, pop up and clubhouse.

Suggested Actions

- Specifically for your community, start making a list of successful business people who may have given back in the past. Is there one in particular that you might know that you can speak with to better understand what they are looking for, how best to approach them, what might get them to want to be involved?

- Who are those that run local community groups, universities and schools, libraries and town hall, or support organizations? Make a list, talk to them about what you are thinking and see who might be interested in helping out.

- Who in your community wants to make a difference, might have experience to offer, is someone that may be interested in giving some of their time.

- Can you identify people in your community that are great conveners that could host a broad cross-section of your community? Those that, if they threw an event, others would be curious to go to? Make a list of these people.

- How much effort and cost do you think it would take to put a plan together your sponsors would back for three years? Think business case! Maybe talk to a local accountancy firm or business person about what they would expect and how much time they feel it might take to create a compelling plan. Put a cost to it, add some contingency, and that is the budget you need covered by 5 or 6 successful business people to get you going. It will be small money for them but they'll expect something proper from it so make sure you plan in enough. Once you have that secured... congratulations. You're on your way.

Chapter 10
Time to ACT

Well, that's a wrap!

Our world needs people like you to try new things and take seriously the power of community to transform lives and economies. When we are facing what feels like a crisis every other day, it is hard to believe that an intentionally created community can be the core driver of the change we are looking for... but it is.

We have far too long let society fall into the trap of comfort and consumption. This has resulted in broken economies and struggling people. Instead let's do hard things and build the future together. Let's honor the magic in each of us and spend our time on things we believe in; things that matter.

With every ounce of my being, I beg you to lead in your community and normalize setting clear goals, mentorship, and gatherings that inspire, celebrate and support those on the journey of flourishing.

If you'd like to learn more about how we can come alongside you, please do not hesitate to connect with us. There are many ways we can support and it ranges from you being a part of our national association (no cost) and plugging into quarterly calls to hear updates about other communities creating and implementing the Better model, to us coaching, training, and supporting you, your community, company, or real estate campus every step of the way or, you could just not try

and settle into the couch, watch another Netflix episode and then whine about how you wish the world was different.

I'll leave you with two quotes and a thought:

"All around you, people will be tiptoeing through life, just to arrive at death safely. But dear children, do not tiptoe. Run, hop, skip, or dance, just don't tiptoe." – Shane Claiborne

"Most men lead lives of quiet desperation and go to the grave with the song still in them." – Henry David Thoreau

The world needs leadership right now to help us all sing our song. The only progress that really matters is progress that leaves humanity BETTER in the long run. It is time to act and you are the one to lead.

Onward!

Behind the scenes

The Organization(s):

It was back in 2013 when all of this started. It was first a fun experiment that got out of hand and actually transformed a town. Fast forward to today, and we have worked across 3 countries, 12 states, 9 Universities and Colleges, 3 National Labs, and we have even co-authored national legislation designed to support rebuilding communities and economies.

To service this work, we have set up a parent company, Aesop Industries Inc, that invests in and supports companies transforming communities and economies in a way that unleashes Human Flourishing.

The companies in the Aesop Industries Inc Family are:

- Innovation Collective: A company that designs and implements custom Flourishing plans using the Better model for communities, corporations, and real estate campuses.

- Build Cities: A digital network built on the BETTER method, allowing people worldwide to share their projects and skills, gather for events, and collaborate locally and globally. It is designed for universal use, with features for governments, corporations, and real estate developers to attract and support their target residents, employees, and tenants by

providing better social and economic infrastructure. Build Cities is the modern work, live, play, learn, create network.

- ReAlign Ventures: A series seed and A venture capital fund that deploys wisdom, access, and capital within creative communities to help grow successful companies that transform the world. ReAlign Ventures has a team of over 300+ mentors called "The Fellows" who actively engage in supporting Better Communities.

- IC ReBuild: An industry leader in designing, developing, and activating properties for the modern work, live, play, learn, create lifestyle using the BETTER method as the super amenity. It operates from a belief that the real estate industry has created emotionless "boxes" and lazily relied on market forces to fill them up. ReBuild uses an approach to activate properties and attract or retain tenants that redefines the "why" behind the "where."

The Author:

Nick Smoot is the passionate systems thinker behind this work. He has a long history in community development, has founded and/or invested in 19 companies, designed, invested in, and/or developed over 500,000 sq feet of community and startup space, co-authored state and federal legislation, is obsessed with harmonizing the human condition with late stage capitalism, and is a big believer of the magic inside every human.

The Inspirations:

This book could not have been completed without the insights and support of so many people.

First, there is Jenn Farwell. Jenn is not only a bad-ass leader championing Innovation Collective, but she is also a former village administrator, a rural economic development specialist, grant guru and detail obsessed. Jenn, you are a legend and this book would not be complete without you, your thoughts, and your additions.

Next, we have Jens Bachem. Jens is a partner in Aesop and can take the most abstract and creative concept and boil it down to the most beautifully simple chart. His gift for this is borderline frustrating because he is so good at it. As a leader, Jens has patience and wisdom that has helped refine this model into something that can more easily spread to the world. Jens, you truly are a gift to the world.

Now, we have Amish Patel. Amish is not only a cofounder of ReAlign Ventures, but also a voice in the big cities singing the praises of this revolutionary model we have been working on for years. What an incredible journey it has been! From being a speaker at some of the very first events to now being a co-founder with you in ReAlign Ventures, you are living a remarkable life, and your voice holds significant value for me and countless others.

Lastly, I'd like to mention a few key folks who have helped push me, challenge me or inspire me. Brad Dugdale, you have always been there. Thank you. Noam Chomsky, thank you for pushing me to think of ways to create a better world. Our time spent together will always be special. Nely Galan, you spicy powerhouse you! You have shown me that trademarks matter and I can be more than I thought. Mike Milken, your passion and execution in shaping the world is so good and has left imprints on me that will never leave. Steve Case, thank you for modeling for me what power and influence can look like as you have led a contrarian movement to wake up and pay attention to the overlooked places. Dr. Charles Buck, our late night discussions about how to revolutionize the education industry. Burt Rutan, you have

shown me what true "confidence in nonsense" looks like and I hope to make you proud. Deepak Chopra, your belief in the Flourishing Pledge means the world to us. Joe Heath, I will never forget you helping me paint the wall in the very first pop up den. Doug and Annette Smoot, you have been such a help and inspiration along the way, thank you. Anderson and Atticus, my sons, thank you for being my assistants in this journey. Anna, our morning coffee to share our wild ideas has been such a wonderful gift and your steady heart and mind as we explore today is something I'm deeply grateful for.

To all of you who have helped, shared insights, wisdom, and thoughts that have challenged and shaped me, I am forever grateful for the adventure, beauty, and pain we have experienced together.

May we, together, give the best of ourselves to the world we believe in.

Additional Resources

To sign the Flourishing Pledge, visit www.FlourishingPledge.com

Head to and sign the pledge. From there, you will receive a monthly newsletter/update that will have helpful links and tools for creating a flourishing plan for your community. Additionally, we will invite you to a quarterly call and workshop where we will provide trainings, opportunities for cities creating plans to share how they are implementing them, and together we can move our Flourishing Pledges into executable Flourishing Plans.

Clubhouses:

A walk-through of can be viewed here, or our colleagues at IC Rebuild can share more about how we do it.

Overview of a Think Big Festival:

A video highlighting what a Think Big Festival can look like. Contact Innovation Collective to learn more. View here.

Confidence in Nonsense awards:

Fun video of Nick Smoot interviewing legendary inventor Burt Rutan to frame up the "Confidence in Nonsense" awards for the Think Big Festivals. This video is an example of the type of culture you aim to create. View here.

The American Dream Factory Podcast:

Nick Smoot hosts the American Dream Factory Podcast where he interviews members and leaders about the idea of a shared global experiment to remove barriers in helping people achieve greatness. Listen here.

Contact us:

Please do not hesitate to contact us. Send an email (info@innovation collective.co) and/or sign the Flourishing Pledge. Let's be friends and change the world together.