

The Importance of Cultivating our Elk Community

Why we need each other

- Living in a community promotes our health and well-being
- Our minds are relational and affected by the quality of our social connections
- Community is built through acts of intentionality, vulnerability, and creativity
- Community is a safe environment

Our relationships, more than anything else, set the stage for our health, happiness, and well-being. Research indicates that the quality of our social relationships affects a range of health outcomes, such as our mental health, physical health, and mortality risk (Umberson & Montez, 2010). These relational effects start in early childhood and lead to cascading effects throughout life, which can either positively or negatively impact our health and development.

We are relational beings in nature, and when we're isolated or detached from a community, our health and mental health can quickly take a toll. PTSD, Depression, anxiety, and mood disorders are all exacerbated by isolation. Life is hard enough on its own. We're not meant to go about it alone. Take a look at your hand, one finger can do little, but if all the fingers move together, they form a powerful fist. Imagine what we can accomplish as a community, if behind us we had the power of the Thundering Herd ?

Research within the field of interpersonal neurobiology sheds light on our biological need for community. Thanks to the work of Dan Siegel and others, we learn the degree to which our minds themselves are both *embodied* and *relational*. What we experience in our minds is highly influenced by our *relationships and shared connections* with others. Our

network of social supports serves as the most profound predictor of our health and well-being.

In other words, our diet, how often we journal, or the number of daily positive affirmations we repeat isn't nearly as important as the community we surround ourselves in. The social connections we have (or don't have) can literally shape the physical structure and development of our brains, leading to integrated or disintegrated mental states. As Siegel notes, "Relationships are not icing on the cake; they are the cake. In fact, they are the main course as well as the dessert." When combined with the power of purpose they become a huge force for positive growth. "He who has a why to live for, can bear with any how." V. Frankl

How do we grow our Elk Community ?

Build it

Embrace vulnerability

Take the small steps

Read about each of these on elks6.com under the Newsletter. And I would love to hear from our community, please send any ideas, suggestions or comments to the Lodge office in care of The Leading Knight.

Read about each of these on elks6.com under the Newsletter. I would like to hear from you. What things do you see in our Elk community that you would like to see change? How can we build a more inclusive accepting and vibrant Elk community? What does a safe Elk environment look like to you? Please send your responses, questions and ideas to me at the lodge office addressed ATTN: Leading knight. I would love to receive your feedback so that we can be the change we want to see in our community.

Build it.

In order to benefit from a community, we have to be intentional about creating and maintaining one. This includes all of us introverts, too. For even we need regular social interaction with others. This means stepping out and starting new conversations, joining a new group, going out to lunch with co-workers, or re-connecting with old acquaintances. Volunteering, whenever I am feeling down. Which can happen often as I am a retired combat veteran with PTSD. I try to help someone, being of service is the best way to get out of my own head. Being of service doesn't have to be with another person, for example; the front street animal shelter is always looking for volunteers. For our Elk community there are many ways to be of service, just participating helps make our community better.

Embrace vulnerability.

In addition, the quality of our relationships often depends on how willing we are to be vulnerable with others and the degree to which we can respect others' vulnerabilities. According to Brene Brown, vulnerability refers to the feeling we experience during times of uncertainty, risk, or emotional exposure. And genuine, authentic friendships and relationships often require these emotional risks.

If we want to experience deeper relationships and shared connections with others, we have to be willing to share our struggles, hopes, and needs with those we come to know and trust. The vulnerability arises when we let our most authentic selves be truly seen and known by others, which is both the antidote to shame and bedrock for trust and connection.

Take the small steps.

Building a community doesn't mean we have to befriend every new person we see or fill up all our weekends with volunteering and social encounters. Having a work life balance is important. If your entire world is the Elks lodge that is a problem for another conversation. However, A sense of community can be nurtured by taking small steps, like starting a conversation with your neighbor, checking in on a member, or stopping to say "hi" to a volunteer. Building a sense of community starts with small, intentional acts of kindness and acknowledgment.

One of our precious mottos is, "The faults of our members we write upon the sand, Their virtues upon the tablets of love and memory." How often do we fail in this act of forgiveness? I am personally guilty of this one. I tend to hold onto personal resentments and internalize them. This maladaptive pattern of behavior doesn't help my personal relationships. How about you? How often instead of practicing forgiveness do we hold on to resentments, or moments where we felt disrespected by another person? Someone once told me that resentment was like drinking poison and hoping the other person would get sick. Holding onto hate in my heart hurts me and those people closest to me. A safe community is one where we practice compassion, empathy, and love for each other.

With feelings of isolation and mental health problems on the rise in our society, now, more than ever, it's important to be intentional about connecting with our community. If indeed our relationships serve as the foundation for our health, happiness, and well-being, they deserve the time, energy, creativity, and sacrifice needed to strengthen and maintain them.

Okay, now I would like to hear from you. What things do you see in our Elk community that you would like to see change? How can we build a more inclusive accepting and vibrant Elk community? What does a safe Elk environment look like to you? Please send your responses questions and ideas to me at the lodge office addressed ATTN Leading knight. I would love to receive your feedback so that we can be the change we want to see in our community.