

Relationships Are What Really Matter

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What attracts people to a community? Research shows people are not as motivated by taxes as we often presume. A compelling case is often made that low taxes are the key to a municipality's success, but evidence indicates people are drawn to places that have quality services and ample opportunity, with tax rates that reasonably reflect the cost of providing those services and creating those opportunities.

There is much evidence proving that what draws people to a community is far different than what makes them stay in a community. That is important information if you are going to build lasting success. Many municipalities make all the right moves in the beginning. They provide great services by finding efficient and focused uses of adequate tax dollars. People and businesses are drawn to the community because of the evident amenities and opportunities: a pool, a recreation center, a beautiful library. Sporting facilities and fields abound and the population grows. Everything seems great.

What keeps people in a community, however, are the relationships and bonds formed between members of the community. Those bonds and relationships create a sense of belonging, and it is that sense of belonging that keeps someone in a community. It is the lack of bonds and relationships that make it easy for a person or family to leave. I have seen it played out in many real-world examples.

Building and marketing the services and opportunities available to families in a community is an important part of attracting new people. Imagine a town or village is trying to attract a new doctor. The doctor will often only relocate if there are services and opportunities available to her or his children and spouse. The family will want to live in a quality place with great amenities. They will only stay, however, if relationships develop and bonds are formed that make the entire family feel like they belong. Those relationships and bonds are what make the community a home.

So many communities focus on the attraction stage, but neglect the importance of the retention stage. When that happens in our personal relationships, those relationships fall apart. We all work hard through dating to woo our future spouse. That is the attraction stage. The marriage stays strong if we have a good relationship and continue working to keep it a strong relationship. That is the retention stage. If we stop working at it, the bond weakens and the relationship ends. The marriage follows suit.

The people we attract to our municipalities with services and opportunities will not stay if they don't form bonds and relationships that make them feel part of the community. Your attraction rates may be great, but if your retention rates are lousy, your success will be short lived. Municipalities that realize the value of relationships and bonds create incredible social opportunities for newcomers to mix and mingle with locals. They increase the number and diversity of social clubs, volunteer organizations, and community functions, and facilitate the intermingling of community members to ensure there is ample opportunity to make new relationships and strengthen those bonds.

Those municipalities that don't constantly look for new ways to knit the community together find themselves in trouble when people show up for the amenities, but leave when they find a place that feels like home.

This syndicated content is provided by Doug Griffiths, best-selling author and chief community builder at 13 Ways, a company with a mission to push communities to face their challenges to find their unique path to success. For more information visit www.13ways.ca, or we can start the conversation at info@13ways.ca.