

# YOURS and OURS

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Ancient survival instincts are very recognizable in children. For instance, when a child doesn't want to share their toy, the behaviour is rooted in an instinct that you had to keep what was yours-your territory, your food, your allies-or you were putting your own survival at risk. As adults, we tend to think that we can control those baser tendencies. We believe we apply reason to each situation, and through experience, have developed new instincts that encourage partnering and cooperation. The reality is that our brains have not evolved as much as the world around us. We simply apply reason to support and justify those baser survival instincts that make us naturally territorial and possessive.

Just as early tribes of nomads fought over the animal herds they followed for food and clothing, and then agrarian settlements sprang up that fought over land, we continue to fight over territory founded in a desire to increase our financial, political and moral influence. Our reason tells us we do so to protect what is "ours", because the others aren't trustworthy. We act to protect our autonomy, often before we ever attempt to discover if we have something in common to unite us. We instinctively think in the terms: Us vs. Them.

Make no mistake, we have learned that it is sometimes wise to make our family bigger. Early on, it was literally family that got added to our team. Then it was friends and neighbours who would become part of our mix, and eventually it became regions and territories that would unite to protect themselves and what was theirs, against other regions and territories. And therein lies the part we always forget. We presume we have outgrown our primal instincts to be territorial and protectionist, and that we have learned to work together. We haven't. Our instincts only lead us to work together when we have a common threat and a common enemy to address. We are still slaves to our primordial instincts.

Now move that train of thought to communities. The world continues to become more global, and continued advances in technology will only solidify that more. Industry and business are not looking for single communities, or single cities, to invest and do business in. They are looking for progressive regions, and states or provinces and countries to do business in. They are looking for places with a good quality of life for their employees, a competitive tax and regulatory regime (not necessarily the lowest, just competitive), and access to a broad swath of markets. That trend, which is nothing new and is not going away, should be enough to have us working together as civilized adults. Yet, we don't.

So many of our communities around the continent are faced with great challenges. We are losing businesses and industry. Our farms are consolidating faster every year, which means our rural regions are in population decline. We are at risk of losing services, while taxes go up to support what is left. Our schools are at risk of closing, and we have little internal capacity to invest in attracting new families and businesses back. It's a tough place to be in, but the obstacles are not insurmountable.

Our old instincts get the better of us in this situation, however. We feel at risk. We feel threatened. We feel vulnerable. And the greatest challenge is that we can't see the enemy, because the enemy doesn't stand at our borders. The enemy isn't another group. It is change. But we don't want to change (or we are afraid of change) so we resist it and look for an enemy we can see. We let our old instincts kick in and we hunker down to protect our autonomy, our borders, and our existence...completely unaware that such a mentality-refusing to work together-is exactly what results in the end of our community.

Very often we feel that our responsibility as leaders in our community is to protect it and keep it safe by defending its boundaries. Without partnerships and cooperation, however, those attitudes are what will cause our communities to continue to suffer and eventually dissolve and die. Seeing past those old instincts of protecting territory and autonomy is difficult to do. Those instincts have been with us for millennia. Seeing how your community's survival is dependent on cooperating with neighbours, and giving up a bit of that autonomy, must become the overriding instinct in the modern world. The survival of our communities depends on it.

*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](http://www.13ways.ca), or we can start the conversation at [info@13ways.ca](mailto:info@13ways.ca).*