

**ASTD 2008 TechKnowledge Conference and Exposition
Session W101
Build Friends to Raise the Best Practice Learning Bar**

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Session Objectives:

- Apply tools appropriate to the degree of interaction based on the phase of community-building
- Use a phased approach to build credibility and incorporate knowledge sharing and mentorship
- Leave room for the local voice of the community in course modules

Definitions

A few definitions of community and community-building:

1. "... a web of relationships among people who have something meaningful in common, such as a beloved hobby, a life-altering illness, a political cause, a religious conviction, a professional relationship, or even simply a neighborhood or town.a Web community is simply a community that happens to exist online, rather than in the physical world." (From Amy Jo Kim's book *Community Building on the Web*)

2. "'Online community' is the concept of convening people in virtual space and describes a range of online activities including electronic collaboration, virtual networks, Web-based discussions or electronic mailing lists." (From Victoria Bernal's article *Building Online Communities: Transforming Assumptions Into Success*)

3. "People often think that blogs, forums, wikis, and other tools **are** community. In actuality, those tools are just that - tools. They can help you to build community, but they aren't actually 'community'. When we talk community, we're simply talking about an interaction, a connection. Blogs or forums are a way to initiate and sustain that interaction...(community is) A group of people who form relationships over time by interacting regularly around shared experiences, which are of interest to all of them for varying individual reasons." (From Jake McKee's *Community Guy* website, April 2005)

4. "Virtual communities are social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace." (From Howard Rheingold's book *The Virtual Community*)

5. "... an aggregation of individuals or business partners who interact around a shared interest, where the interaction is at least partially supported and/or mediated by technology and guided by some protocols or norms." (From the article *A Typology of Virtual Communities*, by Constance Elise Porter in the *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication* 10(1), November 2004)

6. "...is a network of constituent groups who represent multiple functions, levels and geographies. The community draws upon the diverse perspectives of members to open up thinking, generate better ideas and improve program and project implementation." (Info-Line, August 2002, ASTD)

Benefits of Community

- People feel like a part of something
- A community may help alleviate feelings of isolation that can occur in an online training environment.
- People share information, exchange and create ideas
- A sales rep in New Jersey may have just the solution for a sales rep in Portland, OR.
- Leaders emerge
- As in classroom environments, online communities spawn leaders, super-users, and frequent responders to posts.
- Competition
- Sometimes online communities can form alliances and friendly competition for sales goals or lower rates of returned products. This is healthy as long as it doesn't breed inter-store resentments 😊
- Loyalty and buy-in
- Ideally, community-building can be one of many factors that create loyalty for a brand. (This is mostly a client benefit that can follow the first four learner benefits)

The Phases of Community

Why phases?

- Allows baby steps into this new arena where we feel like there is worth, but don't have the hard numbers to prove it to our clients.
- Gather feedback from our audience each step of the way, so we are honing as we go
- Prime the audience for future community-building efforts ... community evolves "naturally"

Phase 1: Anonymous Community--The audience knows the community exists, but does not see or hear others in the community.

Benefits:

- Set the stage for later phases of community building
- Gather information about your audience to support future community-building projects
- Engage learners slightly more than not having a community
- Low-risk way to get into community-building—don't spend a ton of money on it, and more importantly, you won't fall flat on your face in front of your user base. **You can't have community without credibility!**

Phase 2: Two-Way Communication-- The audience communicates with us and we filter their communications and make them available to the audience.

Benefits:

- Increases participation
- Produces statistics
- Promotes knowledge sharing
- Provides recognition
- Fosters "success story" -worthy behavior

Phase 3: Active Community-- Users communicate with one another through the site, without intervention or (heavy) censorship.

Benefits:

- Training as the destination
- Loyalty and buy-in
- Creates "pull" -people want to become members of the learning community

Lessons Learned – Five Principles for Successful Community

Lesson One--Leave room for the voice of the local community.

Lesson Two--Keep your behavioral goals in sight.

Lesson Three--Follow through on your promises.

Lesson Four--Make sure your organization is prepared to take on the tasks of community building.

Lesson Five--Secure internal and external buy-in.

Needs Analysis Checklist

Define the correct community phase

Phase One

- ✓ Little or no budget
- ✓ Need to gather information about your audience
- ✓ You do not have personnel to manage/distribute the information to the users

Phase Two

- ✓ Need to share knowledge in a low cost manner
- ✓ Learners want to acquire knowledge in a self-directed way
- ✓ Need to gather additional or more concrete knowledge about your audience and organization-wide business problems
- ✓ Anonymity is important to your users
- ✓ Your audience is dispersed
- ✓ Need quick solutions to immediate problems
- ✓ It is important to your organization to share best practices
- ✓ You want to help people do their jobs

Phase Three

- ✓ Users feel comfortable enough to speak out about challenges they face on the job-no reprisals
- ✓ Users want to know each other by name
- ✓ Users want to connect to an expert in their knowledge area of need
- ✓ Users want a sense of ownership and autonomy
- ✓ It is important to your organization to share best practices
- ✓ Need help identifying training needs
- ✓ Want to recognize top performers in a non-competitive way
- ✓ You want to help people do their jobs
- ✓ Your users have diverse expertise and knowledge