

The Value of a Coaching Community

Teri-E Belf

What do you hunger for in your coaching world? How can being in “community” make you a more successful coach? Realizing that growth and education comes from participating in a community, seventeen years ago I created Success Unlimited Network® (SUN), an international learning community of coaches.

In the late 1980's, I was a sole proprietor coach when I realized there were other coaches who might be interested in carving out the time to form a learning community grounded in spiritual integrity. One of my personal priorities was to focus on learning.

“People can align toward a common goal, such as running a race, without being in community. People can engage in learning discussions, as in community education programs, without being in community. Coaches can coach a group of people in an organization without being in community. Coaching learning communities need all three to be present (coaching, learning, and community) for the supportive magic to occur.” *Coaching With Spirit*, John Wiley, 2002, page 244.

As a community builder, having previously started three other communities including the Healthcare Training Network, the Organization Transformation Network, and G-WAC (the Greater Washington Alliance for Coaches), I knew that a community grew when its members share key values. So I put together my five key values (integrity, spirituality, service, personal growth and fun) and seven pieces of well being (authenticity, trust, support, challenge, fun, learning, and friendship) to be the core of a new blend of people. And now, for over fifteen years the SUN coaching community has been coming together for these reasons. And SUN is just one of several coaching communities available for coaches.

The purposes of the SUN community in order of importance, as ranked by 85%+ of the SUN community members in Fall 2003, are:

1. To come together in community
2. To continue our learning and growth
3. To increase coaching skills and competencies
4. To learn new techniques
5. To have fun
6. To revitalize our passion for coaching
7. To share resources
8. To recharge our personal batteries
9. To practice coaching
10. To observe others coach

11. To progress toward our business goals

12. To foster business collaborations

13. To review coaching basics

In addition, these three themes emerged: learning, connection and business. If we look at some of the ways for doing and being a coach, we note parallels to how we do and be in community. (You might recognize our 11 key coaching competencies.) A great coaching community must:

- Preserve its foundation in integrity,
- Negotiate clear agreements about appropriateness and members needs,
- Create a safe and supportive environment with intimacy, trust and respect for individuality,
- Invite full participation and the presence of the members to be open, organic and flexible,
- Take risks as necessary,
- Be light-hearted, as appropriate,
- Enable members to manage themselves (setting boundaries) while in a group so that their essence is not devoured,
- Promote active listening, powerful questioning and direct communication to create connection,
- Support individuals to go beyond the layer of self to that of community,
- Facilitate learning and results
- Reinforce personal accountability for actions and choices.

Community can be our mirror. One of the functions community can offer us is the opportunity to practice and experience within a group setting, the underlying reasons why we chose coaching as our profession. "The goal of community is to form a diverse body of people with common goals and empower them to embrace their own gifts, selves and nature. Community holds a space for all its members to work at becoming as close to their true selves as possible," states Sobonfu E. Some in *Welcoming Spirit Home*.

Supplement your life as a coach by becoming a member of a coaching community. You will see the results of your efforts and participation.

Coaches gain much value by being part of a coaching community!