

## WHAT IS "COMMUNITY BUILDING"

"Community building," is an approach to human relations developed by the American psychiatrist and writer Scott Peck, intended to break down the barriers that separate people, and allow our deep desire to escape from our existential isolation and to relate openly and lovingly to others to happen.

The method itself is based on the fact that a sense of community sometimes happens spontaneously in times of crisis - natural or man made: in these circumstances people forget their individual prejudices, differences, and reserve, and help each other, experiencing their shared humanity, working together for a common purpose with a great deal of satisfaction and effectiveness, even though the situation might be very difficult.

In his work with many types of groups, Peck noticed that on occasions a similar phenomenon would take place, without there being any external crisis, only a minor internal one related to the need to achieve the goals of the group. The usual catalyst of success in these occasions would be the willingness and ability of one or more members of the group to give up their need to control, preach or convert the others, to impose a solution, to appear as perfect, even to give up the original goal of the group. If and when sufficient momentum was created by more participants adopting a similar attitude, an indescribable joyous sense of openness, belonging, recognition, mutual acceptance, respect, love and peace would grow in the group, providing healing for the participant, and an invigorating boost of energy for the accomplishment of the group's task.

From these observations Peck developed a simple, down to earth approach, which in most cases succeeds in bringing the group into the desired state. In a "community building" workshop, which normally lasts two to three days, a group of people, mainly strangers to each other, come together with the apparently impossible goal of becoming a "community". The "facilitators", who are in charge of the workshop, guide the participants only minimally. There is no compulsion to do or say anything; the only requirement asked of the participant is to be present physically during the sessions, paying close attention to what happens in the group, and within themselves.

When the state of community is reached, the participant can experience a joy that perhaps for most is beyond what they might have considered humanly possible. Additionally, and perhaps yet more importantly, the participant will have learnt something about the ways in which a different, more open, sincere and vulnerable way of communicating with others brings us closer to each other, and releases the energies that otherwise get spilled in squabbles - lessons to be applied in the world of everyday life and everyday relationships, at home or at work.

For in-depth information, the reader is referred to the books of Scott Peck, in particular the following two:

- "The Road less travelled" (translated into Dutch as "De andere weg" (Servire)) - an introduction to the author's ideology.
- "The different Drum" - a detailed analysis of the group processes leading to community - English only.

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