



BE — THE — ONE

*How One Person Can Help
Transform a Community —
and Inspire the World*



Stronger People
Brighter Neighbourhoods
A Kinder World



People
Connection
Possibility
Change
Here.



ROSS HARVEY



DEDICATION

For my great friend, Dr. Brent Brooks.

This book began over breakfast.

Brent and I were talking about my life in NDG, the Montreal neighbourhood I call home, and about the things I have been trying to do there.

I told him about my mornings.

About sitting outside the grocery store before much of the neighbourhood is awake.

About greeting people on their way to work.

About spending time in the lobby of my apartment building.

About walking the streets of NDG and getting to know the people who live there.

About trying to notice people.

About trying to encourage them.

About dreaming up programs that might help neighbours help neighbours.

About my belief that a community can become something extraordinary when people begin caring for one another again.

And Brent said something wonderfully simple:

“What the world needs is a Ross Harvey doing what you do in every community.”

I knew what he meant.

He wasn't really saying that the world needs millions of Ross Harveys.

It doesn't.

The world needs millions of people willing to be the one.

The one who notices.

The one who cares.

The one who says hello.

The one who learns someone's name.

The one who sees a problem and asks, *What can I do?*

The one who brings people together.

The one who dreams.

The one who begins.

Brent gave me the idea for this book.

And so, my dear friend, I dedicate it to you.

May the idea you planted over breakfast travel farther than either of us can possibly imagine.

And may it help someone, somewhere, decide:

I will be the one.

INTRODUCTION

WHAT IF IT WERE YOU?

There are millions of communities in this world.

Big cities.

Small towns.

Suburbs.

Villages.

Apartment buildings.

Neighbourhoods.

Blocks.

Streets.

And in virtually every one of them there are people who are lonely.

People who need encouragement.

People struggling financially.

People who don't have enough food.

Seniors who could use a hand.

Young people who need someone to believe in them.

Parents who are exhausted.

People who have lived twenty feet apart for ten years and don't know one another's names.

There are also people with enormous gifts who have never been asked to use them.

People who would gladly help someone if they knew that help was needed.

People who want community but don't know how to create it.

People who are waiting for somebody else to begin.

This book is about that somebody.

I think it could be you.

YOU DON'T NEED TO SAVE THE WORLD

For much of our lives, we are taught to think that meaningful change happens somewhere else.

Governments change things.

Foundations change things.

Corporations change things.

Charities change things.

Politicians change things.

Famous people change things.

People with money change things.

Maybe.

But there is another kind of change.

It happens when somebody walks into a coffee shop and knows the server's name.

It happens when a neighbour notices that an elderly woman hasn't been outside for three days and knocks on her door.

It happens when somebody starts a little free library.

It happens when a person sees a family struggling and quietly finds a way to put groceries on their table.

It happens when somebody organizes neighbours to help one another.

It happens when someone sits on the same bench every morning until strangers become acquaintances and acquaintances become friends.

That kind of change doesn't make the evening news.

But it can change a life.

And enough changed lives can change a neighbourhood.

Enough changed neighbourhoods can change a city.

Enough changed cities can change a country.

And perhaps enough changed communities really can change the world.

But don't start with the world.

Start with your street.

CHAPTER ONE

SHOW UP

If I had to reduce everything I have learned about building community to two words, they might be these:

Show up.

That's it.

Not:

Create a strategic plan.

Not:

Establish an organization.

Not:

Raise a million dollars.

Not:

Become an expert.

Just:

Show up.

Go somewhere where people are.

And come back tomorrow.

Then come back again.

Something remarkable begins to happen.

People recognize you.

Then they acknowledge you.

Then somebody smiles.

Then somebody says hello.

Then somebody stops.

Then somebody tells you their name.

Eventually somebody tells you their story.

And one morning you realize something.

These aren't strangers anymore.

They are your neighbours.

MY OFFICE

I have an office in NDG.

There is no desk.

No receptionist.

No conference table.

No computer.

In fact, technically, it isn't an office at all.

It is a couple of benches outside a grocery store.

But I call it my office.

Early in the morning, I go there.

People are heading to work.

Employees are arriving.

Delivery drivers come and go.

Parents bring children to buses.

Dog walkers pass.

People wait for transportation.

Most mornings, I don't accomplish anything that would appear on a conventional business report.

I talk to people.

I wave.

I smile.

I ask how somebody is doing.

I notice when someone hasn't been there for a few days.

I learn names.

I learn stories.

And slowly, almost imperceptibly, something happens.

A tiny piece of community forms around a bench.

There is no membership.

There are no dues.

There are no meetings.

Nobody had to approve it.

Nobody funded it.

It simply happened because somebody kept showing up.

That is one of the great secrets of this book.

You can do this too.

CHAPTER TWO

THE MINISTRY OF SMALL THINGS

We have become fascinated by scale.

A million followers.

A billion dollars.

Global movements.

Viral videos.

Massive organizations.

I dream big too.

Very big.

But I have learned something important:

Big dreams are often built from very small acts.

A smile.

A wave.

Remembering someone's name.

Opening a door.

Buying somebody breakfast.

Giving someone a ride.

Asking a sincere question.

Listening to the answer.

Telling somebody:

“You are doing a great job.”

These things seem insignificant.

They aren't.

You have no idea what someone is carrying when you encounter them.

You don't know what happened before they walked through that door.

You don't know what awaits them when they get home.

Sometimes one person acknowledging them may be the brightest moment of their day.

So acknowledge them.

NOTICE PEOPLE

This may be the first real assignment in *Be The One*.

Tomorrow, notice people.

Don't change your schedule.

Don't join anything.

Don't spend money.

Don't announce a new initiative.

Simply become more aware.

Look at the people you normally pass.

The cashier.

The bus driver.

The crossing guard.

The janitor.

The person delivering bread to the grocery store.

The woman walking the same dog every morning.

The man sitting alone.

The child waiting for the school bus.

The neighbour getting into the elevator.

Look up.

Smile.

Say hello.

And when circumstances allow, learn a name.

Names matter.

A person stops being “the guy who delivers the chips” and becomes a human being with a story.

The person with the dog becomes a neighbour.

The grocery employee becomes someone whose absence you notice.

The stranger becomes Darren.

Or Stefania.

Or Victoria.

Or Jack.

Or Ben.

Or Jonah.

Or Jay.

And suddenly you aren't walking through a neighbourhood populated by strangers.

You are walking through your community.

That transformation happens inside you before it happens anywhere else.

CHAPTER THREE

DON'T WAIT FOR PERMISSION

One of the greatest obstacles to changing our communities may be our belief that somebody needs to authorize us.

Who gave you permission to build community?

Nobody.

Good.

You don't need it.

You don't need permission to say hello.

You don't need permission to check on a neighbour.

You don't need permission to organize a street barbecue.

You don't need permission to encourage somebody.

You don't need permission to introduce two people who should know one another.

You don't need permission to dream about what your neighbourhood could become.

And you certainly don't need permission to care.

This is incredibly liberating.

You can begin today.

CHAPTER FOUR

DREAM BIG. START TINY.

My dreams for NDG are enormous.

I envision a community in which nobody goes hungry.

A place where neighbours know and help one another.

A community filled with opportunities for exercise, recreation, learning, creativity and friendship.

I imagine Lifestyle Coaches helping people become the best versions of themselves.

I imagine programs connecting people who have something to give with people who need it.

I imagine Block Captains who know their streets.

I imagine neighbours helping neighbours.

I imagine food being shared instead of wasted.

I imagine children growing up surrounded by adults who know their names.

I imagine seniors knowing that somebody will notice if they need help.

I imagine people discovering that the greatest resource in their community isn't government funding or corporate sponsorship.

It is one another.

I call the larger vision **A NuVo World.**

But here's the important part.

I don't wake up every morning and transform NDG.

I couldn't.

I wake up and go sit on a bench.

That distinction matters.

Dream as big as your imagination allows.

Then ask:

What tiny thing can I do today?

Do that.

Tomorrow, do another.

CHAPTER FIVE

YOU DON'T HAVE TO DO EVERYTHING

This lesson has taken me time to learn.

When you see possibilities everywhere, you naturally want to pursue all of them.

You want to create programs.

Contact people.

Write proposals.

Find champions.

Solve problems.

Build organizations.

Recruit volunteers.

Raise money.

Change everything.

And then reality arrives.

People are busy.

They have families.

Jobs.

Problems.

Commitments.

Some people will love your idea but won't have time to help.

Some will promise to call and won't.

Some will be enthusiastic for three days.

Some won't respond at all.

That's okay.

Don't become discouraged.

And don't become resentful.

Keep going.

Do what you can.

Let your actions become your invitation.

People are often more inspired by something happening than by something proposed.

So begin.

Build slowly.

Let people see it.

Let them experience it.

And leave the door open.

Eventually someone may ask:

“Can I help?”

When they do, welcome them.

CHAPTER SIX

FIND YOUR ONE SQUARE MILE

You do not need responsibility for your entire city.

Choose your place.

Your neighbourhood.

Your village.

Your apartment building.

Your school community.

Your street.

Perhaps even your block.

Think of it as your one square mile.

Learn it.

Walk it.

Notice it.

Where do people gather?

Where are people isolated?

Who are the connectors?

Where are the churches?

Schools?

Community centres?

Libraries?

Food banks?

Parks?

Coffee shops?

Local businesses?

Who already serves the community?

What is missing?

Who needs help?

Who has something to offer?

Do not begin by asking:

“How do I fix this place?”

Begin by asking:

“How can I love this place?”

That question changes everything.

CHAPTER SEVEN

BECOME A CONNECTOR

You do not need to provide everything people need.

Often, your greatest contribution is knowing who can.

Someone needs food.

Someone else runs a food program.

Connect them.

A senior needs help carrying groceries.

A teenager nearby wants to contribute to the community.

Connect them.

A local organization needs volunteers.

Someone you met last week is looking for meaningful ways to spend retirement.

Connect them.

A young person has a wonderful idea.

A business owner has resources.

Connect them.

A lonely neighbour wants companionship.

Another neighbour is lonely too.

Connect them.

This is community building at its simplest.

Know people.

Know what they need.

Know what they can give.

Help them find one another.

You become a bridge.

And bridges don't need to be the destination.

They simply help people get where they need to go.

CHAPTER EIGHT

YOUR NEW PARTNER: ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

There is another reason I believe this idea can spread around the world today in a way that would have been impossible only a few years ago.

You don't have to do this alone.

I certainly haven't.

I use ChatGPT constantly.

I use it to think.

To write.

To organize.

To brainstorm.

To develop programs.

To prepare messages.

To explore possibilities.

To turn a thought that occurs to me during a neighbourhood walk into something concrete.

Artificial intelligence cannot care about your neighbourhood for you.

It cannot replace your smile.

It cannot sit beside the lonely person.

It cannot shake your neighbour's hand.

It cannot become the human being your community needs.

But it can help you become far more effective.

This is why *Be The One* will not simply tell you what I have done.

I want to help you duplicate it.

Not exactly.

Your community isn't NDG.

And you aren't me.

That's the point.

I want you to take the principles, tools, ideas, successes and mistakes contained in these pages and adapt them to wherever you live.

You can have an AI partner helping you think through each step.

You can tell it about your neighbourhood.

You can brainstorm programs together.

You can create invitations.

You can prepare meeting agendas.

You can draft community newsletters.

You can develop volunteer plans.

You can create surveys.

You can organize ideas.

You can ask:

“What should I do next?”

And then you can close the computer, walk outside and do something AI never can.

You can show up.

CHAPTER NINE

BE THE ONE

Perhaps nobody is coming.

Perhaps there isn't going to be a charismatic leader who suddenly transforms your community.

Perhaps government isn't going to solve every problem.

Perhaps some enormous charitable foundation isn't about to discover your neighbourhood.

Perhaps nobody is going to knock on your door and appoint you Official Community Builder.

Good.

Because none of that is necessary.

There is already somebody there.

You.

You don't have to be extraordinary.

You don't have to be wealthy.

You don't have to be young.

You don't have to be retired.

You don't need a degree.

You don't need political connections.

You don't need thousands of followers.

You need eyes that notice.

Ears that listen.

A heart that cares.

And feet willing to walk out the door.

Start with one person.

Then another.

Start with one bench.

One lobby.

One street.

One little idea.

One act of kindness.

One conversation.

One introduction.

One invitation.

One morning.

Then show up again tomorrow.

The world is enormous.

Its problems can feel overwhelming.

But every community is made of streets.

Every street is made of homes.

Every home contains people.

And every person wants, at some level, to know that they matter.

You can help somebody know that today.

You can become the person who begins.

You can become the connector.

You can become the neighbour.

You can become the example.

You can become the catalyst.

You can become the one who refuses to walk past people as though they are invisible.

And perhaps Dr. Brent Brooks was onto something over breakfast.

Perhaps what the world needs isn't another grand institution.

Perhaps what the world needs is simply **one person in every community who decides to begin.**

In mine, I am trying to be that person.

In yours, perhaps it is you.

BE THE ONE.

CHAPTER TEN

START WITH LOVE

Before we talk about programs, volunteers, organizations, technology, funding or anything else, we need to talk about the foundation beneath all of it.

Love.

Not love as a slogan.

Not love as something sentimental.

Love as something you do.

Love is noticing.

Love is listening.

Love is remembering.

Love is showing up.

Love is asking someone how they are doing and actually waiting for the answer.

Love is seeing somebody who seems invisible to everyone else.

Love is giving your time when there is nothing in it for you.

Love is deciding that another person's happiness matters.

If you want to transform a community, start there.

Love the people who are already in it.

You don't need to agree with them.

You don't need to understand everything about them.

You don't even need to particularly like everyone you encounter.

You simply make the decision that every person you meet matters.

That changes how you walk through the world.

Instead of seeing a crowd, you begin seeing individuals.

Instead of seeing strangers, you begin seeing potential friends.

Instead of seeing problems, you begin seeing people.

And once you see people, everything else becomes possible.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

LEARN THEIR NAMES

There is something almost magical about using another person's name.

Think about the difference between:

“Good morning.”

and:

“Good morning, Darren.”

One acknowledges a person.

The other says:

I remember you.

That matters.

I have made learning names part of my life in NDG.

Sometimes I forget them.

Sometimes I have to ask again.

That's okay.

What matters is trying.

Because eventually something changes.

The neighbourhood becomes populated by people you know.

The man you see every morning isn't “the guy from Metro.”

He is Darren.

The woman with her daughters isn't simply "the mother at the bus stop."

She is Stefania.

Her daughter is Victoria.

The man with the large dog is Jonah.

The man at the outdoor gym is Ben.

The delivery driver is Jack.

The fellow I once gave a ride to is Jay.

These are tiny pieces of information.

But together they create something enormous.

Belonging.

And belonging is one of the great needs of the human heart.

THE NAME CHALLENGE

Try this for thirty days.

Learn one new person's name each day.

Not thirty people at once.

One.

Your cashier.

Your neighbour.

The person working at the coffee shop.

The security guard.

The person you regularly see walking a dog.

The person sitting beside you on a bench.

Ask:

“I'm sorry, I see you all the time and I've never asked your name. What is it?”

Then remember it.

The next time you see them, use it.

Thirty days later, thirty strangers may no longer be strangers.

Imagine if ten people in your neighbourhood did this.

Imagine if one hundred did.

That is how culture begins to change.

CHAPTER TWELVE

LISTEN FOR THE STORY

Once you know someone's name, something else often follows.

Their story.

People carry remarkable stories.

The problem is that nobody asks.

The person stocking the grocery shelves may have worked somewhere else for seventeen years.

The woman walking her dog may have cared for a sick husband.

The teenager behind the counter may dream of becoming an engineer.

The elderly man sitting alone may once have run a company.

The young mother waiting for a bus may be exhausted and frightened about making rent.

The person who seems unfriendly may simply be having the worst week of their life.

You don't know.

So don't assume.

Listen.

You don't need to interrogate anyone.

You don't need to become everyone's therapist.

You simply become interested.

There is a wonderful question you can carry with you:

“Tell me about yourself.”

Then stop talking.

You may be amazed by what follows.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE POWER OF ENCOURAGEMENT

I have come to believe that encouragement may be one of the world's most underused resources.

It costs nothing.

There is no shortage.

It requires no government program.

And almost everybody needs more of it.

Tell people when they are doing something well.

Tell the delivery driver you notice how hard he works.

Thank the person cleaning the floor.

Compliment the cashier who is patient with an elderly customer.

Tell the parent that her children are wonderful.

Tell the teenager you appreciate his manners.

Tell somebody their smile brightens your morning.

Tell your neighbour you are glad to see her.

Don't manufacture compliments.

Notice something true.

Then say it.

We think positive thoughts about people all the time and never tell them.

Why?

Say the good thing.

You have no idea how far those words may travel.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

CREATE YOUR OFFICE

You don't need an actual office to become a community builder.

In fact, I would argue that the best office may be somewhere people naturally pass.

Mine happens to be outside a grocery store.

Yours could be a coffee shop.

A park bench.

A library.

A community centre.

A dog park.

A playground.

A walking trail.

A church foyer.

The lobby of your apartment building.

The location isn't important.

Consistency is.

Find somewhere that naturally intersects with the lives of other people.

Then become a familiar face.

You don't need to carry a clipboard.

Don't recruit anybody.

Don't hand out brochures.

Don't begin by telling people about your grand plan for transforming the community.

Just be there.

Smile.

Say hello.

Learn names.

Listen.

Help when opportunities appear.

Let relationships come first.

THE ONE-HOUR EXPERIMENT

Try something.

Choose one hour each week.

Same day.

Same place.

Go there.

Be present.

Do it for three months.

Don't measure success.

Don't count contacts.

Don't ask whether it is productive.

Simply show up.

At first, nothing may happen.

Then someone will recognize you.

Eventually someone may say:

“You're always here!”

That's when you know something is happening.

You are becoming part of the landscape.

You belong there.

And because you belong there, other people begin belonging with you.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

WALK YOUR COMMUNITY

There is a tremendous difference between driving through a neighbourhood and walking through one.

When you drive, you see buildings.

When you walk, you see people.

Walk slowly.

Look around.

Notice the gardens.

Notice the broken sidewalks.

Notice the little libraries.

Notice the empty storefronts.

Notice the playgrounds.

Notice where seniors gather.

Notice where teenagers hang out.

Notice the person sitting alone.

Notice the dogs.

Dogs, incidentally, may be among the greatest community-building tools ever invented.

People who would never speak to one another will happily talk about a dog.

“What kind is he?”

“How old is she?”

“What is his name?”

And suddenly two strangers are talking.

The dog has made the introduction.

Walk often enough and the same people begin appearing.

Wave.

Smile.

Eventually stop.

You are mapping something much more important than streets.

You are mapping human connections.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

BUILD FROM WHAT ALREADY EXISTS

When people decide they want to improve their communities, there is a temptation to create something new immediately.

Resist that temptation.

First, discover what already exists.

There may already be a food bank doing wonderful work.

There may already be churches helping families.

There may already be community organizations supporting seniors.

There may already be sports programs for children.

There may already be merchants who quietly help people every day.

There may already be volunteers doing exactly what you were thinking of doing.

Don't compete with them.

Find them.

Thank them.

Learn from them.

Support them.

Connect people to them.

Ask what they need.

Community transformation does not require your name to be attached to everything.

The objective isn't to build your empire.

The objective is to build your community.

Sometimes the greatest thing you can do is help somebody else's good idea succeed.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

ASK A BETTER QUESTION

There is a question that can change the way you approach community building.

Instead of asking:

“What can I create?”

ask:

“What is needed?”

Those are very different questions.

The first begins with you.

The second begins with the community.

Walk around.

Listen.

Talk to people.

Talk to schools.

Talk to local businesses.

Talk to churches.

Talk to food organizations.

Talk to seniors.

Talk to young people.

Ask them:

“What would make this community better?”

Then listen for patterns.

Perhaps loneliness keeps appearing.

Perhaps food insecurity.

Perhaps transportation.

Perhaps young people have nowhere to gather.

Perhaps seniors need small household jobs done.

Perhaps parents need occasional help.

Perhaps residents simply don't know their neighbours.

Don't assume you know the answer.

Let the community tell you.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

NEIGHBOURS HELPING NEIGHBOURS

One of the simplest ideas I have imagined for NDG is also one of the most powerful:

Neighbours Helping Neighbours.

It doesn't require an enormous institution.

It requires connection.

Someone needs a ride to an appointment.

Someone nearby has a car.

Connect them.

Someone needs help moving a piece of furniture.

Two neighbours can help.

Someone is recovering from surgery.

Another neighbour can pick up groceries.

Someone's computer isn't working.

A teenager down the street knows exactly how to fix it.

Someone needs a dog walked.

Someone else loves dogs.

Someone is lonely.

Someone else would love company.

The resources often already exist.

The problem is that the people don't know one another.

Community building is frequently not about creating new resources.

It is about connecting existing ones.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE BLOCK CAPTAIN

Imagine one person on every block who simply cares.

Not an authority.

Not a politician.

Not somebody spying on neighbours.

A connector.

A friendly face.

Someone who knows people.

Someone who notices when an elderly neighbour hasn't been seen.

Someone new residents can approach.

Someone who can help organize a block gathering.

Someone who knows where community resources are.

Someone who can connect people who need help with people willing to provide it.

Call this person a Block Captain.

Or don't call them anything.

Titles don't matter.

Function does.

Imagine a city filled with thousands of these people.

Not controlling communities.

Caring for them.

Suddenly nobody has to transform an entire neighbourhood.

Each person simply cares for their little corner of it.

CHAPTER TWENTY

GIVE BEFORE YOU ASK

This principle is important.

If you want people to become involved in your community, don't begin by asking what they can do for you.

Begin by asking what you can do for them.

Give.

Encourage.

Connect.

Support.

Promote their work.

Attend their event.

Introduce them to someone useful.

Volunteer.

Buy something from their business.

Thank them.

Become known as someone who contributes.

Then something remarkable happens.

Trust develops.

Later, when you say:

“I have an idea.”

people listen differently.

You are no longer a stranger asking for something.

You are part of the community.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

DON'T KEEP SCORE

Some people will never reciprocate.

Help them anyway.

Some people won't thank you.

Help them anyway.

Some people you support will disappear when you need assistance.

Don't become bitter.

Community isn't an accounting system.

If every act of kindness creates an invisible debt, it isn't really kindness.

Give because giving is who you choose to be.

That doesn't mean allowing people to take advantage of you.

Boundaries matter.

Your family matters.

Your health matters.

Your time matters.

But within those boundaries, give freely.

You may help one person who never helps you.

That person may help someone else.

You may never know.

Goodness travels in directions we cannot see.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

YOU ARE NOT THE SAVIOUR

This may be one of the most important chapters in the book.

If you decide to become “the one,” be careful.

You are not responsible for everybody.

You cannot solve every problem.

You cannot rescue every person.

You cannot run every program.

You cannot attend every meeting.

You cannot answer every request.

And you should not try.

Your purpose is not to make everyone dependent upon you.

It is almost the opposite.

Your purpose is to help people discover one another.

The strongest community isn't one with a heroic person at the centre doing everything.

It is one where thousands of people are helping one another.

If everything collapses when you stop, you haven't built a community.

You have built a dependency.

So give things away.

Give away responsibility.

Give away credit.

Give away leadership.

Help other people become the one.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

FIND THE CHAMPIONS

Every community contains champions.

Most of them don't know they are champions yet.

A retired teacher.

A university student.

A parent.

A restaurant owner.

A pastor.

A nurse.

A teenager.

A businessperson.

A coach.

A senior.

Someone who has lived on the same street for forty years.

When you have an idea, ask:

“Who would love this?”

Not:

“Who can I convince?”

Those are different approaches.

Find the person whose eyes light up when you describe the idea.

That's your clue.

If you have to drag somebody into a project, they probably aren't your champion.

Keep looking.

The right person may eventually say:

“I've wanted to do something like this for years.”

Beautiful.

Now you aren't recruiting.

You are releasing something that was already inside them.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

LET PEOPLE SAY NO

This is liberating.

Ask.

Then release the outcome.

People are busy.

They have responsibilities you may know nothing about.

They may love you and love your idea and still say no.

Let them.

Don't make people feel guilty.

Don't pressure them.

Don't interpret every unanswered message as rejection.

And don't allow somebody else's lack of enthusiasm to determine your own.

Your dream was given to you.

Not necessarily to them.

Keep the relationship.

Release the expectation.

Continue forward.

A gracious no is better than a reluctant yes.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

DO IT YOURSELF — FOR NOW

Sometimes nobody joins you.

What then?

Begin anyway.

Not recklessly.

Not with enormous financial commitments.

Not by exhausting yourself.

Start with whatever you can reasonably do alone.

If your idea is a neighbourhood cleanup, pick up one bag of garbage.

If you envision community gardens, begin with one planter.

If you want neighbours sharing food, give something away.

If you want people greeting one another, start greeting people.

If you want a more caring apartment building, become the caring neighbour.

If you want a neighbourhood where people feel seen, see them.

Create a tiny demonstration of the world you want.

People understand demonstrations better than proposals.

Show them.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

LET IT GROW

Nature rarely hurries.

Seeds don't become trees on Tuesday because somebody created a strategic plan on Monday.

They grow.

Community works much the same way.

Plant.

Water.

Wait.

Keep showing up.

Some ideas will flourish.

Some won't.

Some programs you believe will be enormous may never get off the ground.

Something you barely thought about may suddenly capture everyone's imagination.

That's okay.

You aren't controlling an assembly line.

You are cultivating a garden.

Your job is to create conditions where good things can grow.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

YOUR FAMILY COMES FIRST

There is a danger in trying to make the world better.

You can become so busy loving humanity that you neglect the human being sitting beside you.

Don't.

Your community matters.

Your projects matter.

Your dreams matter.

But the people closest to you matter more.

For me, that means Christy.

I can dream about transforming NDG.

I can write books.

I can develop programs.

I can imagine A NuVo World.

But none of those things should cause me to forget the person with whom I am actually sharing my life.

There is no victory in building community while neglecting home.

Your mission should make you more loving.

Not less.

More present.

Not less.

More available to the people you cherish.

Not less.

Sometimes the most important community-building activity you can undertake today is turning everything else off and having lunch with the person you love.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

BUILD A LIFE, NOT A PROJECT

This isn't meant to become another job.

It is a way of living.

You don't need to spend eight hours every day building community.

You can build community while doing things you already do.

Walk.

Shop.

Have coffee.

Sit outside.

Take your children to school.

Walk your dog.

Attend church.

Exercise.

Ride the bus.

Go to the library.

The difference is intentionality.

You are no longer merely passing through these places.

You are participating in them.

You are watching for opportunities to connect.

And because of that, ordinary life becomes extraordinary.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

THE RIPPLE

You may never know what your smallest actions accomplish.

You smile at someone.

They smile at someone else.

You encourage a teenager.

Years later, that teenager encourages a child.

You introduce two neighbours.

They become friends.

One of them eventually helps the other through a crisis.

You start a program.

Someone improves it.

Another community copies it.

Someone halfway around the world eventually does something inspired by an idea that began on your street.

You never hear about it.

That's okay.

You aren't building a monument.

You are creating ripples.

Throw the stone.

Let the water take care of the rest.

CHAPTER THIRTY

WHAT IS YOUR NDG?

Mine is Notre-Dame-de-Grâce.

NDG.

A neighbourhood in Montreal.

It's where I live.

It's where I walk.

It's where I meet people.

It's where I am trying to put these ideas into practice.

But NDG isn't the point of this book.

Your community is.

Perhaps you're reading this in Toronto.

London.

Chicago.

Sydney.

Mumbai.

Nairobi.

A small village in Italy.

A suburb in New Zealand.

A condominium in Florida.

A town of eight hundred people.

It doesn't matter.

Look outside.

That is your NDG.

Those are your people.

Those are your streets.

Those are your possibilities.

Don't copy what I do literally.

Copy the principle.

Care deeply about the place where you are.

PART TWO

FROM CARING TO CREATING

So far, we have concentrated primarily on becoming.

Becoming present.

Becoming aware.

Becoming connected.

Becoming useful.

Becoming someone who notices.

That foundation matters enormously.

Because programs without relationships become bureaucracy.

Organizations without love become institutions.

Plans without people become documents sitting on shelves.

But once relationships begin forming, another question naturally emerges:

What could we build together?

This is where community building becomes exciting.

Because suddenly you begin seeing possibilities everywhere.

What if neighbours shared things they no longer needed?

What if nobody in the neighbourhood had to go hungry?

What if every street had someone looking out for the people living there?

What if seniors could easily ask neighbours for small amounts of help?

What if lonely people could find companionship?

What if young people could contribute their talents?

What if local businesses became active partners in community life?

What if every person had someone encouraging them toward a healthier, happier, more meaningful life?

What if technology could connect all of this?

What if artificial intelligence could help ordinary people organize it?

And what if the ideas that worked in one community could be shared freely with another?

Now we are moving beyond a philosophy.

We are beginning to build a model.

In the chapters ahead, I will show you some of the ideas I am working to develop in NDG.

Not because you should reproduce all of them.

But because they demonstrate something important:

Once you begin seeing your community differently, possibilities appear everywhere.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

THE COMMUNITY INVENTORY

Before creating anything, take inventory.

Not of buildings.

Of abundance.

This is a radically different way of looking at your neighbourhood.

Most community planning begins with deficiencies.

What don't we have?

What is broken?

What do people need?

Those questions matter.

But begin with another:

What do we already have?

You may discover extraordinary wealth.

Not necessarily money.

People.

Skills.

Time.

Knowledge.

Buildings.

Kitchens.

Cars.

Tools.

Gardens.

Meeting rooms.

Businesses.

Churches.

Schools.

Restaurants.

Retired professionals.

Students.

Tradespeople.

Artists.

Athletes.

Teachers.

Musicians.

Cooks.

Drivers.

Mentors.

People with spare bedrooms.

People with unused bicycles.

People with tools sitting in garages.

People who know how to repair almost anything.

People who simply have two free hours every Tuesday afternoon.

Your community may already possess much of what it needs.

It just isn't connected yet.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

ASK TWO QUESTIONS

Imagine asking every person in your community two simple questions:

What do you need?

and:

What can you give?

Those two questions could transform a neighbourhood.

One person needs help with a computer.

Another can give computer help.

One needs a ride.

Another can give rides.

One needs conversation.

Another can give companionship.

One needs children's clothes.

Another has boxes of them.

One needs help learning English or French.

Another is a retired language teacher.

One needs a small table.

Another is about to throw one away.

One needs hope.

Another has plenty to share.

Need.

Gift.

Need.

Gift.

Community happens when we connect the two.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

BECOME THE MATCHMAKER

This may eventually become one of the most important jobs of the person who chooses to Be The One.

Not solving.

Matching.

When somebody tells you what they need, don't automatically ask:

“How can I provide that?”

Ask:

“Who do I know?”

Who has that skill?

Who has that resource?

Who might enjoy helping?

What organization already provides this?

What business might participate?

What neighbour mentioned something similar last week?

This protects you from trying to become everything to everyone.

You don't need to own the resources.

You need to know where they are.

Eventually, technology can help enormously with this.

Imagine a community database—not one designed to invade privacy, but one people voluntarily participate in—where needs and gifts can find one another.

Even without technology, you can begin with a notebook.

Start noticing.

Start remembering.

Start connecting.

Become the human bridge.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

WHAT IF EVERYTHING BEGAN WITH ONE?

One person.

One street.

One neighbourhood.

That is enough.

I don't know how far *Be The One* will travel.

Perhaps only a few people will read it.

Perhaps thousands will.

Perhaps millions.

That isn't mine to determine.

But I can imagine something.

I can imagine someone reading this book in a community I will never visit.

They close it.

They think for a moment.

Then they open ChatGPT and type:

“I just read *Be The One*. I want to begin doing this in my community. Help me get started.”

And the conversation begins.

They describe their neighbourhood.

They describe what they have noticed.

They identify their strengths.

They talk about the people they already know.

Together, they develop a simple plan.

Nothing enormous.

Maybe tomorrow morning they walk to the coffee shop.

Maybe they introduce themselves to three people.

Maybe they contact a local food organization.

Maybe they create a neighbourhood gathering.

Maybe they start a sharing group.

Maybe they simply sit on a bench.

Then they come home and tell ChatGPT what happened.

And together they ask:

“What next?”

Day after day.

Week after week.

Month after month.

A person and an AI partner working together—but always with the human being doing the most important part:

loving actual people.

Now imagine this happening in one hundred communities.

One thousand.

Ten thousand.

One hundred thousand.

No central headquarters is necessary.

No massive bureaucracy.

No single leader controlling everything.

Just ordinary people everywhere deciding to become extraordinary neighbours.

That is the possibility I see.

And perhaps it all begins with four words:

I will be the one.

PART THREE

THE BE THE ONE COMMUNITY TOOLKIT

Ideas are wonderful.

But ideas become meaningful when somebody uses them.

This section is about practical ways to begin creating stronger, kinder, more connected communities.

You do not need to launch all of these.

You should not launch all of these.

Read them.

Think about your community.

Ask what is most needed.

Ask what excites you.

Ask what could begin simply.

Then choose one.

One idea is enough to begin.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

BUY NOTHING — SHARE MORE

Look around your home.

How many things do you own that you rarely use?

A drill.

A ladder.

A cake pan.

Children's clothes.

Books.

Sports equipment.

Furniture.

Tools.

Kitchen appliances.

Toys.

Decorations.

Now multiply that by every home in your neighbourhood.

The amount of unused abundance is astonishing.

At the same time, somebody nearby may be preparing to buy the exact thing sitting unused in your closet.

That is why sharing communities can be so powerful.

The idea is simple:

Before buying, ask if someone nearby already has what you need.

Before throwing something away, ask if someone nearby could use it.

This saves money.

Reduces waste.

Helps people.

But there is another benefit that may be even more important.

It creates interaction.

A chair changes hands.

Two neighbours meet.

A child's bicycle is passed from one family to another.

People begin recognizing names.

Somebody borrows a tool and later returns the favour.

Objects become introductions.

And introductions become relationships.

START SMALL

You do not need a sophisticated platform.

Begin with a neighbourhood Facebook group.

A community bulletin board.

An email list.

A group chat.

Even a simple sign in your apartment lobby.

Try:

NEIGHBOURS SHARING WITH NEIGHBOURS

Have something you no longer need?

Need something someone else may have?

Ask here before buying or throwing away.

That is enough.

The objective isn't merely reducing consumption.

It is increasing connection.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

FEED THE COMMUNITY

There should be few things more fundamental than this:

People should have enough to eat.

Yet food insecurity exists in communities filled with food.

Restaurants discard food.

Grocery stores have surplus.

Households throw things away.

Organizations operate kitchens.

Volunteers want to help.

Donors want meaningful ways to contribute.

Once again, the problem may not always be absence.

Sometimes it is coordination.

So ask:

Who already provides food?

Where are the gaps?

Which organizations need help?

Which restaurants might participate?

Which businesses might sponsor meals?

Who could deliver food?

Who has kitchen space?

Who knows which families are struggling?

Do not begin by trying to create another food bank if an excellent one already exists.

Begin by strengthening what is there.

Maybe your role is finding sponsors.

Maybe it is connecting restaurants to an existing organization.

Maybe it is arranging deliveries to seniors.

Maybe it is organizing a monthly food drive.

Maybe it is simply volunteering.

Remember:

Be The One does not mean Be Everything.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

NEIGHBOURS HELPING NEIGHBOURS

Imagine a simple community network where residents can say:

“I need help.”

And other residents can say:

“I can help.”

That is the entire idea.

The needs may be small.

Often they are.

Changing a light bulb.

Moving a box.

Picking up medication.

Walking a dog.

Driving someone to an appointment.

Helping set up a computer.

Shovelling snow.

Carrying groceries.

Sitting with someone who is lonely.

These things can become enormous problems for someone who cannot do them.

Yet for another neighbour, they may require twenty minutes.

The bridge between the two is connection.

CREATE A SIMPLE SYSTEM

You can begin with three categories:

I NEED HELP

I CAN HELP

I KNOW SOMEONE WHO CAN HELP

That third category is important.

You do not personally need to solve the problem.

You may know someone who can.

Soon, one person's network begins becoming everyone's network.

That is community.

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

THE BLOCK CAPTAIN IDEA

Take your neighbourhood and divide it into blocks.

Now imagine one caring person on each block.

Not someone in charge.

Someone connected.

The Block Captain might:

Welcome new neighbours.

Know which seniors live alone.

Share information about community events.

Help organize a yearly block gathering.

Connect residents with local resources.

Check in during emergencies.

Encourage people to know one another.

That is enough.

THE RULE OF LIGHTNESS

Be careful not to turn this into bureaucracy.

The moment you create forty forms, twelve committees and mandatory monthly meetings, you may kill the very spirit you are trying to create.

Keep it light.

Keep it human.

Keep it voluntary.

A Block Captain's most important qualification is simple:

They care about people.

Everything else can be learned.

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS

Some ideas need somebody to lead them.

Not forever.

But at least to get them moving.

I call these people Champions.

A Champion is the person who says:

“I'll take responsibility for helping this happen.”

Perhaps you want to create a youth mentoring initiative.

Find someone who loves working with young people.

Perhaps you want to build a food program.

Find someone who understands food service or community organizations.

Perhaps you want a seniors' support network.

Find someone who loves seniors.

Perhaps you want a community fitness program.

Find someone passionate about health.

The Champion should not be chosen because they are available.

They should be chosen because the idea fits them.

LOOK FOR ENERGY

Here is one of the best ways to identify a Champion.

Describe the idea.

Then watch.

Do their eyes light up?

Do they begin adding ideas before you finish explaining yours?

Do they say:

“I know exactly who we should talk to.”

Do they start imagining possibilities?

That is energy.

Follow it.

Community-building works best when responsibility is aligned with enthusiasm.

CHAPTER FORTY

LIFESTYLE COACHES

One of the ideas I have thought deeply about is creating community-based Lifestyle Coaches.

Not therapists.

Not doctors.

Not financial planners.

Not clergy.

Though all of those professionals may be part of someone's support system.

The Lifestyle Coach is something simpler.

A trusted human being who helps another person ask:

How am I doing?

What do I want to improve?

What is getting in my way?

Who could help me?

What small step should I take next?

Think of them as a navigator.

Someone who helps another person move toward a healthier, happier and more meaningful life.

THE WHOLE PERSON

People do not live in categories.

Physical health affects emotional health.

Financial stress affects relationships.

Loneliness affects everything.

Purpose matters.

Friendship matters.

Movement matters.

Sleep matters.

Food matters.

Spiritual life may matter.

Meaning matters.

A good Lifestyle Coach does not pretend to be an expert in all of these things.

They help the individual find the right resources.

Again, the role is often connection.

CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

COMMUNITY MEALS

Something special happens when people eat together.

Conversation becomes easier.

Barriers soften.

Children play.

People linger.

Food creates a natural reason to gather.

So one of the simplest community-building initiatives may be a meal.

Not a fundraiser.

Not a formal dinner.

A meal.

A church supper.

A neighbourhood barbecue.

A picnic.

A breakfast.

A potluck.

A community table in a park.

MAKE IT EASY TO ATTEND

Do not make everything complicated.

Do not require registration unless necessary.

Do not create expectations that everyone brings something.

Do not make people feel embarrassed if they cannot contribute.

The objective is not culinary excellence.

The objective is:

Come. Eat. Meet someone.

That is enough.

CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

LITTLE LIBRARIES AND LITTLE GATHERING PLACES

Sometimes community infrastructure can be tiny.

A little library.

A bench.

A picnic table.

A community garden.

A free pantry.

A noticeboard.

A chess table.

Small physical things can create opportunities for human connection.

Ask yourself:

Where could people naturally pause?

Where could neighbours exchange something?

Where could a stranger become a familiar face?

Community often needs places where nothing is scheduled.

Places where people can simply be.

CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

YOUNG PEOPLE ARE NOT THE FUTURE

We often say:

“Young people are the future.”

That is true.

But it can accidentally dismiss something equally important.

Young people are also the present.

They have ideas now.

Energy now.

Technology skills now.

Creativity now.

Idealism now.

Ask them.

Do not simply design programs for young people.

Invite them to design programs with you.

Give them responsibility.

Trust them.

Listen to their ideas.

Ask:

“If you could change one thing about this community, what would it be?”

You may hear something adults have missed entirely.

CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

SENIORS MAY BE YOUR GREATEST RESOURCE

At the other end of the age spectrum is another extraordinary resource.

Retired people.

Think about what resides in a community's senior population.

Decades of knowledge.

Experience.

Professional expertise.

Parenting.

Business.

Trades.

Teaching.

Cooking.

Sports.

Music.

Languages.

History.

Patience.

Time.

Some seniors desperately want to feel useful.

Do not treat them only as people needing help.

Ask what they can give.

A retired accountant can mentor someone starting a business.

A retired teacher can tutor.

A former executive can advise a nonprofit.

A grandmother can teach cooking.

A retired carpenter can help young people build things.

A senior who cannot leave home easily can still make phone calls to other lonely residents.

Everyone can matter.

CHAPTER FORTY-FIVE

LOCAL BUSINESSES ARE NEIGHBOURS TOO

When thinking about community, do not forget the businesses.

The restaurant.

The grocery store.

The pharmacy.

The coffee shop.

The hardware store.

The barber.

The bakery.

The gym.

These are not merely places where money changes hands.

They are gathering points.

They employ residents.

They know people.

They hear stories.

They often want to help.

DO NOT BEGIN WITH A DONATION REQUEST

This is important.

Do not walk into every business asking for money.

Begin with relationship.

Introduce yourself.

Learn the owner's name.

Buy something.

Tell them what you appreciate about their business.

Ask what they think the community needs.

Eventually opportunities to collaborate may emerge naturally.

A restaurant might provide meals.

A store might donate supplies.

A coffee shop might host a gathering.

A business owner might become a Champion.

But start with respect.

CHAPTER FORTY-SIX

FAITH COMMUNITIES

Churches, synagogues, mosques, temples and other faith communities have historically played enormous roles in community life.

Many already have:

Buildings.

Kitchens.

Volunteers.

Meeting rooms.

Counsellors.

Food programs.

Youth programs.

Seniors programs.

People motivated by service.

If faith communities exist in your neighbourhood, get to know them.

Not as institutions to exploit.

As neighbours.

Ask what they are already doing.

Ask what they see.

Ask what needs they encounter.

Ask how you might support their work.

Different traditions may believe very different things.

That does not prevent them from feeding the same hungry person.

Community can create common ground.

CHAPTER FORTY-SEVEN

SCHOOLS ARE COMMUNITY HUBS

Schools contain another extraordinary concentration of people.

Children.

Parents.

Teachers.

Administrators.

Coaches.

Volunteers.

Facilities.

Ideas.

Energy.

They also sit at the centre of many neighbourhoods.

What if the relationship between school and community extended beyond the school day?

What if students worked on community projects?

What if retirees tutored?

What if local businesses mentored students?

What if students helped seniors with technology?

What if school projects solved real neighbourhood problems?

Education could become deeply connected to place.

And students would learn something textbooks cannot fully teach:

I can make a difference where I live.

CHAPTER FORTY-EIGHT

THE COMMUNITY CONNECTOR MAP

Now we can combine much of what we have discussed.

Take a piece of paper.

Write your name in the centre.

Then begin adding circles around it.

Neighbours.

Businesses.

Schools.

Faith communities.

Community organizations.

Local government.

Food services.

Sports groups.

Seniors.

Youth.

Artists.

Health professionals.

Volunteers.

Do not worry about knowing everyone.

You are mapping possibilities.

Then draw lines.

Who already knows whom?

Who should know whom?

Which two organizations are solving adjacent problems but never speak?

Who needs what someone else has?

Soon you begin to see something.

Your community is not a collection of disconnected organizations and people.

It is a network.

And your role may simply be helping the network become aware of itself.

CHAPTER FORTY-NINE

BUILD THE TABLE

Eventually, bring people together.

Not fifty people.

Start with five.

Invite people from different parts of the community.

Maybe:

A resident.

A business owner.

A school representative.

Someone from a community organization.

Someone from a faith community.

Ask one question:

“What could we do together that none of us could do as effectively alone?”

Then listen.

Do not begin with a fifty-slide presentation.

Do not force your agenda.

Create a conversation.

The most important thing that happens may not be the project you discuss.

It may be that these people meet one another.

Connection creates possibilities you cannot predict.

CHAPTER FIFTY

THE 10-PERSON RULE

If you are overwhelmed by the idea of changing an entire community, use this rule:

Start with ten people.

Get to know ten neighbours.

Or ten local leaders.

Or ten business owners.

Or ten seniors.

Or ten young people.

Listen to them.

Help them.

Connect them.

Now imagine each of those ten people becoming more connected to ten others.

One becomes ten.

Ten becomes one hundred.

One hundred becomes one thousand.

Not because you personally know everyone.

Because community grows through relationships.

You do not need to become the centre of everything.

You need to help create more centres.

PART FOUR

YOUR AI COMMUNITY PARTNER

Artificial intelligence changes what one motivated person can accomplish.

That statement deserves careful thought.

In the past, someone with a community idea might have needed:

A writer.

A designer.

A researcher.

A communications person.

A project planner.

A brainstorming partner.

An editor.

Someone to prepare presentations.

Someone to help organize information.

Today, many of those capabilities can sit beside you in a single conversation.

That does not mean AI should lead the community.

People lead communities.

But AI can dramatically increase the effectiveness of the person who chooses to begin.

CHAPTER FIFTY-ONE

WHAT AI CAN DO

AI can help you:

Clarify an idea.

Create a simple plan.

Draft an invitation.

Write a community post.

Prepare questions for a meeting.

Create a survey.

Brainstorm program names.

Develop volunteer roles.

Prepare an agenda.

Summarize meeting notes.

Create follow-up messages.

Design outreach strategies.

Think through obstacles.

Develop budgets.

Create timelines.

Produce educational materials.

Help you reflect on what happened.

Suggest what you might do next.

That is a remarkable toolbox.

CHAPTER FIFTY-TWO

WHAT AI CANNOT DO

AI cannot replace your presence.

It cannot become the neighbour.

It cannot notice that Mrs. Henderson has not opened her curtains.

It cannot sit beside someone crying on a park bench.

It cannot shake hands with the local grocer.

It cannot personally welcome the new family down the hall.

It cannot love your neighbourhood.

That is your job.

Keep this relationship clear.

AI helps you prepare.

You go live it.

Then come back.

Tell your AI partner what happened.

Reflect.

Adjust.

Go again.

CHAPTER FIFTY-THREE

YOUR FIRST CONVERSATION WITH AI

You do not need to understand artificial intelligence.

You do not need to become technical.

Open ChatGPT.

Tell it what you want to do.

You might begin with:

“I want to become more involved in strengthening my local community. I want to begin small, build relationships first and avoid overwhelming myself. Help me create a simple starting plan.”

Then add information.

Where do you live?

What do you already know about the area?

What organizations exist?

What interests you?

How much time can you realistically give?

What are you good at?

What community needs have you noticed?

You are not filling out an application.

You are having a conversation.

CHAPTER FIFTY-FOUR

GIVE AI CONTEXT

AI becomes more useful when it understands what you are trying to accomplish.

Tell it:

Your vision.

Your priorities.

Your limitations.

Your values.

Your available time.

Your current projects.

What you have already tried.

What worked.

What did not.

Who you have met.

What you learned.

Then ask it to help you think.

Do not ask AI to make every decision.

Use it as a mirror.

A planner.

A challenger.

A writing partner.

A brainstorming partner.

And sometimes as the person who reminds you:

You are trying to do too much.

That can be extremely valuable.

CHAPTER FIFTY-FIVE

YOUR DAILY COMMUNITY JOURNAL

One of the most powerful ways to use AI may be reflection.

After your walk, meeting or community interaction, tell your AI partner what happened.

Who did you meet?

What did you notice?

What surprised you?

What need appeared?

What opportunity appeared?

Did you promise anything?

Is there someone you should follow up with?

Then ask:

“What do you think I should pay attention to?”

Over time, this creates a remarkable record.

Patterns emerge.

Names recur.

Ideas develop.

Your community begins becoming visible in a new way.

And your own growth becomes visible too.

PART FIVE

THE FIRST 30 DAYS

Do not begin by transforming your community.

Begin by transforming your relationship with it.

The next thirty days are designed to help you do exactly that.

You can move more slowly if you wish.

The days are not deadlines.

They are invitations.

DAY ONE

WALK

Take a walk through your community.

No agenda.

No clipboard.

No recruitment.

Look.

Notice.

Where do people gather?

Where do people seem isolated?

What feels alive?

What feels neglected?

Come home and write down ten observations.

Then tell your AI partner what you saw.

Ask:

“What patterns do you notice?”

DAY TWO

SAY HELLO

Today, intentionally greet five people.

That is all.

Do not force conversation.

Simply acknowledge them.

Smile.

Say good morning.

Notice how it feels.

Notice how they respond.

DAY THREE

LEARN ONE NAME

Choose someone you regularly encounter.

Introduce yourself.

Learn their name.

Use it next time.

DAY FOUR

FIND THE GATHERING PLACES

Identify five places where people naturally gather.

A coffee shop.

Park.

Library.

Grocery store.

Church.

School.

Community centre.

Dog park.

Choose one you enjoy.

This may become part of your regular rhythm.

DAY FIVE

TALK TO A LOCAL BUSINESS

Visit a local business.

Buy something if appropriate.

Introduce yourself.

Tell the owner or employee you are trying to get to know the neighbourhood better.

Ask:

“What do you like most about this community?”

Listen.

DAY SIX

NOTICE A SENIOR

Today, pay particular attention to seniors in your area.

Do not assume they need help.

Simply notice.

Are there gathering places?

Programs?

Benches?

Accessibility problems?

Conversation opportunities?

Ask yourself:

How well does this community include older people?

DAY SEVEN

REFLECT

Do nothing new.

Review the week.

Ask:

Who did I meet?

What did I learn?

What surprised me?

What gave me energy?

What made me uncomfortable?

What might I continue next week?

Tell your AI partner.

Ask it to summarize your first week and suggest one focus for Week Two.

DAY EIGHT

LEARN ANOTHER NAME

Simple.

One more person.

Community grows one name at a time.

DAY NINE

FIND AN EXISTING ORGANIZATION

Identify one organization already doing good work locally.

Read about it.

Visit if appropriate.

Do not begin by asking what they can do for you.

Ask:

“What are you working on?”

DAY TEN

OFFER ENCOURAGEMENT

Tell three people something positive you genuinely notice about them or their work.

Be specific.

Watch what happens.

DAY ELEVEN

ASK ABOUT NEEDS

Ask one person who knows the community:

“What do you think people here need most?”

Do not debate.

Listen.

DAY TWELVE

ASK ABOUT ABUNDANCE

Ask another person:

“What do you think this community already has that we don't use enough?”

That question may surprise them.

It may surprise you too.

DAY THIRTEEN

MAKE ONE CONNECTION

Introduce two people who might benefit from knowing one another.

Do not overthink it.

One connection.

DAY FOURTEEN

REVIEW YOUR FIRST TWO WEEKS

By now you have started creating a map.

Not on paper.

In your mind.

People.

Places.

Needs.

Resources.

Ideas.

Ask your AI partner:

“Based on everything I have observed so far, what are three small community-building ideas that fit this neighbourhood?”

Do not launch them yet.

Just consider them.

DAY FIFTEEN

CHOOSE YOUR ONE

Pick one small idea.

Not your ultimate dream.

Something manageable.

Maybe:

A coffee gathering.

A neighbourhood sharing page.

A seniors check-in idea.

A community walk.

A little library.

A volunteer day.

A Block Captain conversation.

A simple neighbours-helping-neighbours group.

Your objective is not scale.

Your objective is to learn.

DAY SIXTEEN

WRITE THE IDEA IN ONE SENTENCE

If you cannot explain your idea simply, make it simpler.

Try:

“I want to create a simple way for neighbours in my building to offer and request small amounts of help.”

Or:

“I want to host a monthly coffee where local residents can meet one another.”

One sentence.

Clear.

Human.

DAY SEVENTEEN

ASK THREE PEOPLE WHAT THEY THINK

Do not pitch.

Ask.

“This is something I'm thinking about. What do you think?”

Listen carefully.

You may discover the idea needs changing.

That is good.

DAY EIGHTEEN

MAKE IT SMALLER

Whatever you planned, shrink it.

If you imagined fifty people, begin with ten.

If you imagined weekly, try monthly.

If you imagined the whole neighbourhood, try your building.

If you imagined a large platform, use a simple email list.

Smaller means easier to begin.

DAY NINETEEN

FIND ONE PARTNER

You do not need a committee.

Find one person who likes the idea.

Ask if they would like to help you test it.

DAY TWENTY

CREATE THE INVITATION

Use your AI partner.

Tell it:

Who you are inviting.

What you are trying to do.

What tone you want.

Ask it to create something short, warm and human.

Do not oversell.

Invite.

DAY TWENTY-ONE

REST

Yes.

Rest.

Community building is a marathon.

Enjoy your life.

Spend time with people you love.

Take the day off from trying to improve anything.

You are allowed to simply live.

DAY TWENTY-TWO

INVITE

Send the invitation.

Then release the outcome.

Some people will respond.

Some will not.

Both are okay.

DAY TWENTY-THREE

KEEP SHOWING UP

Return to your regular gathering place.

Do not let your project replace relationships.

Say hello.

Learn another name.

Community comes first.

Program second.

DAY TWENTY-FOUR

ASK FOR HELP

Make one small request.

Not money.

Something simple.

“Would you bring coffee?”

“Would you help me make a sign?”

“Would you introduce me to Jane?”

Let people contribute.

People value what they help create.

DAY TWENTY-FIVE

RUN THE TINY EXPERIMENT

Hold the coffee.

Start the group.

Create the sharing board.

Take the walk.

Whatever your tiny project is, do it.

Do not expect perfection.

Observe.

Learn.

Enjoy.

DAY TWENTY-SIX

ASK WHAT PEOPLE LIKED

Do not begin with criticism.

Ask:

“What worked?”

“What did you enjoy?”

“What should we keep?”

Build from strength.

DAY TWENTY-SEVEN

ASK WHAT COULD BE BETTER

Now ask:

“What would make this more useful?”

Listen without defending your idea.

It is no longer just your idea.

That is progress.

DAY TWENTY-EIGHT

IMPROVE ONE THING

Do not redesign everything.

Choose one improvement.

Make it.

DAY TWENTY-NINE

FIND THE NEXT PERSON

Who should become involved next?

One person.

Invite them.

Growth should feel organic.

DAY THIRTY

LOOK BACK

Thirty days ago, perhaps your neighbourhood was simply the place where you lived.

Now it may feel different.

You know names.

You know places.

You know stories.

You understand needs.

You see resources.

You may even have begun something.

But the greatest change may be inside you.

You are no longer waiting for someone else.

You have begun.

Sit down with your AI partner and tell it everything you have learned.

Then ask:

“What should my next 90 days look like?”

And continue.

THE BE THE ONE PROMISE

Before moving forward, I would like to invite you to make a promise.

Not to me.

To yourself.

To the people around you.

And to the community you call home.

Say it in your own way.

But perhaps it sounds something like this:

I will notice.

I will listen.

I will learn names.

I will encourage people.

I will look for needs without overlooking abundance.

I will connect people whenever I can.

I will start small.

I will not wait for permission.

I will not try to do everything.

I will invite others to lead.

I will give more credit than I take.

I will protect time for the people I love.

I will use technology as a tool, but never as a substitute for humanity.

I will keep showing up.

I will do what I can, where I am, with what I have.

I will be the one.

PART SIX

FROM ONE COMMUNITY TO THE WORLD

Something beautiful happens when an idea is simple enough to travel.

It does not need to be franchised.

It does not need to be controlled.

It does not need a headquarters.

It simply needs to be shared.

Imagine communities everywhere learning from one another.

A brilliant food idea developed in Montreal is adapted in Manchester.

A seniors program created in Melbourne inspires one in Minneapolis.

A neighbourhood initiative in Nairobi is copied in New York.

A student project in Mumbai becomes a model for Madrid.

Nobody owns kindness.

Nobody owns community.

Nobody owns the idea of neighbours helping neighbours.

The best ideas should travel freely.

CHAPTER FIFTY-SIX

DON'T COPY — ADAPT

This is important.

Do not turn NDG into a template that every community must imitate.

Your place is different.

Climate differs.

Culture differs.

Population differs.

Needs differ.

Governments differ.

Religious traditions differ.

Transportation differs.

Economics differ.

What works in Montreal may make no sense in Manila.

So adapt.

Keep the principles.

Change the methods.

The principles are simple:

Notice people.

Love the place.

Build relationships.

Identify needs.

Identify abundance.

Connect the two.

Start small.

Invite others.

Share what works.

That can happen anywhere.

CHAPTER FIFTY-SEVEN

SHARE YOUR FAILURES TOO

If you try enough things, some will fail.

Good.

Tell people.

Community builders do not need mythology.

We need truth.

Say:

“We tried this. Nobody came.”

“We made this too complicated.”

“We asked too much of volunteers.”

“We launched before listening.”

“We assumed people wanted something they didn't.”

That information is valuable.

Someone in another community may avoid your mistake.

Failure shared becomes wisdom.

CHAPTER FIFTY-EIGHT

DOCUMENT WHAT WORKS

When something succeeds, write it down.

What did you do?

How many people were involved?

What did it cost?

What surprised you?

What would you change?

What materials did you use?

What message attracted people?

How long did it take?

Then share it.

That is how local experience becomes global knowledge.

Your tiny community experiment may eventually help someone you will never meet.

CHAPTER FIFTY-NINE

TEACH SOMEONE ELSE TO BE THE ONE

This may be the ultimate objective.

Not that you become indispensable.

That you become unnecessary.

Teach somebody else.

Then encourage them to teach someone.

If you are the Block Captain, find another future Block Captain.

If you run the food project, mentor someone else.

If you organize the gathering, let somebody else organize the next one.

Leadership multiplies when it is given away.

The strongest community will not have one hero.

It will have thousands of people quietly doing heroic things.

CHAPTER SIXTY

WHAT IF THERE WERE ONE IN EVERY COMMUNITY?

I return to the breakfast that started this book.

My friend Dr. Brent Brooks looked at what I was trying to do in NDG and essentially said:

What the world needs is someone doing this in every community.

The thought stayed with me.

And the more I considered it, the more I realized something.

That person should not be another Ross Harvey.

It should be you.

And her.

And him.

And them.

Different ages.

Different cultures.

Different religions.

Different backgrounds.

Different talents.

Different dreams.

United by one decision:

I will care about the place where I live.

Imagine one person in every community making that decision.

Now imagine ten.

Now imagine one hundred.

Perhaps the world does not need to be changed from the top down.

Perhaps it can also be changed from the sidewalk up.

One conversation.

One street.

One neighbourhood.

One community.

One person at a time.

EPILOGUE

TOMORROW MORNING

Tomorrow morning, the world will wake up.

Millions of people will rush out their doors.

They will commute.

Shop.

Work.

Walk dogs.

Bring children to school.

Sit in coffee shops.

Stand at bus stops.

Ride elevators.

Pass one another on sidewalks.

Most will be surrounded by people they do not know.

You will be among them.

And you will have a choice.

You can move through the day as you always have.

Or you can notice.

You can look up.

You can smile.

You can learn a name.

You can ask a question.

You can encourage someone.

You can listen.

You can help.

You can connect.

Nothing dramatic may happen.

There may be no applause.

Nobody may know what you are doing.

That is fine.

Because somewhere between the smile and the conversation,
something has begun.

A stranger becomes familiar.

The familiar becomes a neighbour.

The neighbour becomes a friend.

The friend introduces another friend.

A little network forms.

Someone needs help.

Someone helps.

A community begins remembering what community means.

And perhaps someday, someone will look at what has
happened where you live and ask:

“How did all of this begin?”

The answer may be remarkably simple.

One person decided to begin.

One person stopped waiting.

One person showed up.

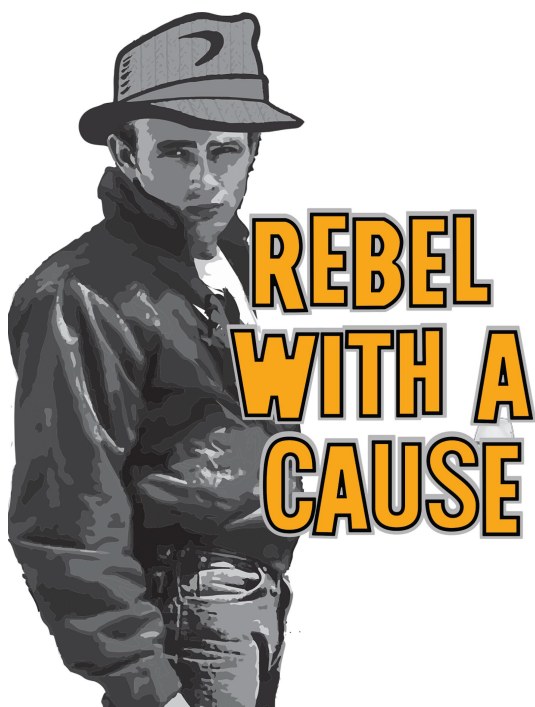
One person cared.

One person said:

I will be the one.

And that person was you.

BE THE ONE.



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