

A S S E M B L Y

C O M M U N I T Y

COMMUNITY

WHICH COMMUNITIES ARE ESSENTIAL TO YOUR THRIVING?

I want you to think about your favourite communities, online and offline. Look at the traits that make those groups valuable.

More often than not, these are the spaces that allow us to show up as just ourselves – feeling comfortable to contribute but also to be cared for. Some of these spaces we may have in mind are organic communities that our lives have offered to us through circumstance – a group of mums at school, friends from church or a club, neighbours we share with or that family whatsapp group that has you howling and allows you to feel connected.

Sometimes though, we can create that community ourselves, or we find ourselves as part of a community that we have been more intentional about – *like this one* – something we have prioritised for ourselves or that we want to build for others.

When you think of communities (past or present) that you have been part of that have allowed you to thrive, to be yourself, to learn and grow - which ones come to mind? And what were the attributes or even the practicalities of that community that enabled you to feel that way? Was it the physical environment? Was it what you were learning? Was it a feeling you got?

LIST THE COMMUNITIES THAT ALLOWED YOU TO THRIVE OR GROW HERE:

WHAT WERE SOME OF THE ATTRIBUTES?:

COMMUNITY

If building community is something that you are keen to do around your business, your ideas, your offerings then I think there are some key components to community that keep it healthy and thriving. I want to look at what those components are...

THREE FOUNDATIONS FOR BUILDING COMMUNITY:

1) TRUST: If you want to build community, you need to build trust with the people you want to serve or exchange with. Getting to know your community well, acknowledging them, being a welcoming force so you can serve them well and build the trust that people deserve to have in you is KEY to building a community that wants to be there. Trust is earned, not a given, so how we interact, how we invest is key.

2) VALUE: Great, thriving communities are built when we provide exceptional value – we create opportunities for sharing information, for being helpful, for offering expertise. What is the biggest pain point of the people you want to connect with? How can you offer solutions to their problems and bring them into conversations where they can share and find answers?

3) COLLABORATION: Great communities feel collaborative – they provide opportunities for people to connect and contribute. The key to lasting community is for people to feel, know and see that their contribution matters. Communities that are highly controlled don't last long – they fizzle out because they don't serve the purpose of collaboration and connection. Great community leaders or initiators know that their community is always about something greater than themselves.

Have a think about the kind of community that you would love to intentionally create around your business or offering. Brainstorm and jot down some of the ways you can build trust, add value and collaborate to build this community well:

COMMUNITY

Finally, I want to give you FIVE quick tips on how to go about beginning to create community around your ideas or business:

1) People connect with people.

You may offer a product, a service or a skill, but ultimately – it's YOU - the person behind the screen or scene that that people want to connect with – ESPECIALLY as consumers are becoming more and more wary of big brands and faceless corporations. This is an incredible time to be in small business because people are hungry for connections with real people, to buy from people they can see and hear.

2) Do your research.

Where do the people you want to build community with hang out? What is important to them? Where do they spend their time? Find out as much as you can about them.

3) Tell stories.

We make sense of the world through storytelling. We are wired for stories. We feel less alone when we hear other peoples stories. Bring people into your story; share your reasons for getting into what you're into, for making what you make. Take people behind the scenes. Share the inside scoop. Tell stories that build connection to you.

4) Encourage sharing.

This connects again to the collaboration element of a thriving community. To build a great community you need to encourage sharing, commenting, calls to action. If all you do is blast out information without an opportunity to connect, what you have is an echo chamber instead of a buzzing space where people can engage. Give the explicit opportunity for sharing, connection and conversation.

5) Create super consistent, valuable content that actually HELPS.

Show up regularly with the people you want to serve. Choose a medium that feels natural to your work, connects you with your target audience and keep service in the forefront of your mind. Be generous with your support and knowledge.

COMMUNITY

Have a look at the list of five things that help to build a thriving community around your business or offering and reflect on the following:

Which of those five things feel most doable to you?

Where are you seeing those community building tips already in action in your life, ideas or business?

What other ideas are swirling around within you about building community?

What are some of the fears that accompany those ideas?

COMMUNITY

I can honestly say that being part of and intentionally building communities have been life and business changing for me.

Sometimes that has felt risky - because to invite people to be part of what you are doing or to be more specific about what you'd like to create or collaborate on can be really vulnerable and exposing.

I'm think back to the very first Assembly invitation I sent out in 2016. I had about 15 women in my head that I had become friends with online and wanted to spend time with. I wanted to create a way that we could support each other in our creativity or the things we were trying to put out into the world without having another boring meeting or conference. I sent them a really rough, rambling email about my idea for dinner and a workshop together in an orchard and then I held my breath.

Slowly their replies trickled back and they were all keen to come. This was the small start of building Assembly to what it is now - a business I'm proud of with women I am inspired by daily. If I had never sent that tenuous email, I would never have met so many of you and been propelled by your wisdom and support.

The risk of reaching out to build community is real, but it is so so worth it.

I'd love for you to think about this for your own circumstances - how would you like to build community into what you are doing? How you can facilitate something within your offering that brings people together?