

Community Building in Brief
By M. Scott Peck

The history of my form of community building "technology" begins in 1981 when I led a one day workshop on "spiritual growth" for sixty people from the DC area under the auspices of Washington University. Almost by accident the participants dramatically became a true "community" within but a few hours. It seemed like a miracle. Over the next three years I used every workshop I was asked to conduct as a laboratory to discover whether there were rules whereby I could make that "miracle" a routinely repetitive phenomenon. I discovered there were such rules by which I could lead unusually large groups into community in an unusually short time in comparison to similar work attempted by such organizations as The National Training Laboratories (NTL) or the Tavistock Institute.

On the assumption that these rules were unrelated to my personality and could be taught so as to develop other "community building" leaders, in December of 1984 my wife and I gathered nine other people together to create the Foundation for Community Encouragement (FCE). The assumption was correct. The organization succeeded in becoming a non-profit public educational foundation and shortly had a corps of approximately sixty well-selected and trained leaders conducting workshops throughout North America.

Slowly at first, beginning with Great Britain, the work of the foundation became increasingly international. FCE leaders have conducted multiple workshops in Taiwan, Australia, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Pakistan, Moscow, Bosnia, Germany and the Netherlands. To our surprise, we discovered that these workshops could be every bit as successful when using translators. We also discovered both overseas and in the United States that the workshops could be equally effective with people of all races, religions, cultural backgrounds and socio-economic status.

We further discovered that the community building process was successful even when the participants were "ordered" into it, as in the case of a cellblock of fifty-five inmates in Louisiana. Moreover, we discovered that the workshops could be used to achieve a whole variety of goals, ranging from conflict resolution and the facilitation of

negotiations to improving literacy training and the effectiveness of drug abuse programs to elevating the morale of town leaders dealing with poverty issues and business executives in both successful and unsuccessful corporations.

Although it can be misleading, I persist in referring to the process of community building as I developed it and FCE enormously refined and improved it, as a "technology". The reason I do so is not to imply that it is something hard and tangible but rather a "soft" kind of technology quite analogous to software. Software is a set of rules one feeds into the computer or hardware so as to teach it how to operate effectively. FCE's work is a way of gently feeding rules into a group of people so that it can function with maximum effectiveness.

I cannot take any personal credit for inventing these rules. They were invented by hundreds, even thousands, of other people not only during the course of the 20th century but over several millennia. The rules come from such diverse sources as Christian and Buddhist monasticism, the use of silence and consensus as developed by the Quakers, the so-called "Tavistock Model" as developed by the British psychiatrist Wilfred Bion during the course of World War II, and the insights of modern management consultants, etc. All I did was to combine such methods into the system of rules I call a technology. It is not a simple system, however, and the rules are many. Some of them are most explicit and some rather implicit. As such, the system or technology actually comprises a culture. Culture is generally defined as the system of rules or "norms", explicit and implicit, by which groups as small as marriages and as large as nations function. The culture of community can also be referred to as a culture of civility. Almost all of its rules are the rules of and for civility.

As defined by FCE, "community" is a group of two or more people who, regardless of the diversity of their backgrounds, have been able to accept and transcend their differences, enabling them to communicate openly and effectively, and to work together towards common goals, while having a sense of unusual safety with one another.

HeartStream Education and Interactive Group Process **By Bill Thatcher**

As Dr. Peck describes in the preceding article, for more than twenty years the interactive group process he describes has been applied across a wide spectrum of learning, living and working environments. It seeks to redress an imbalance in individualism which came to prominence during the second half of the twentieth century in the United States as well as many other parts of the world. The Frenchman Alexis de Tocqueville saw the possibility of such an imbalance while traveling throughout the early United States in the 1830s and wrote about it in his book, *Democracy in America*.¹ A more contemporary diagnosis was made by sociologist Robert Bellah in the 1985 book, *Habits of the Heart*, where a compelling case is made that this imbalance in individualism has indeed come about and led to serious isolation and fragmentation becoming the current and usual state of affairs for us.² Through the further research and writing of Robert Putnam, the issue of social connection and its impact on all sectors of society has both appeared on the popular public agenda and has also been given a name, Social Capital.³ This lack of connection and empathy is of interest to those wishing to understand patterns of criminality because it can lead to disengagement from pro-social living habits and is identified as one of the common criminogenic personality characteristics of a criminal lifestyle.⁴

HeartStream Education utilizes this group process in its CHANGES program. Incorporated into the Changes Program, this process stimulates social learning by quickly and effectively creating group cohesion. We have further developed a follow up curriculum using interactive cognitive learning to further “ground” a participants understanding of what is involved in, “*becoming aware of what is influencing our thoughts, feelings and action toward ourselves and toward others.*”

¹ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. George Lawrence, ed. J.P. Mayer (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1969), p.287.

² Robert Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley Calif.: Univ. of California Press, 1985).

³ Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

⁴ Glenn D. Walters, *The Criminal Lifestyle*, (Newbury Park Calif.: Sage Publications, 1990), p.79.