

Community Culture is Contagious

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These two questions will help you create an incredible community culture so that member engagement is more effortless for you!

A friend told me about a conference she attended, “it was like an alternate universe where everyone was a great friend; I just hadn’t met most of them yet.” Another friend told me about a professional online community that she checks in on before she starts anything else every morning and every night, without fail (and maybe 2-3 more times during the day.) “It is my go-to bucket filler,” she said.

Every once in a while, a story about one of these unicorn communities trickles across my consciousness.

Said community might be in-person or online. The community might have a short life, like just for the duration of a party, or a long life, like a 50-year-old tight-knit professional association. The hosts might have a huge budget, so they can roll out the red carpet for every member, while others have barely two pennies to rub together. From the outside, the only commonality about these communities is that they feel super special.

Extraordinary communities nearly always have a healthy community culture.

On the inside of these communities, leaders create, perpetuate, and reinforce each community's culture. You see, just like there is a staff culture in each organization, there's a member culture in each community. Not attending to that culture allows it to go rogue, creating an unhealthy environment.

Here are some signs of an unhealthy community culture:

- Silence
- Low and slow interaction
- Surface-level conversation (small-talk, tactical)

But extraordinary communities nearly always have a healthy community culture. You can spot a healthy culture a mile away because you'll see:

- Energy and excitement
- Connections being made
- Deep conversations (strategic, supportive)

You might wonder, "How do I create or change the culture of my event, conference, committee, online community, or chapter?" The good news is you can, especially with a little help from your friends (Oh! That line made me think of the *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* album.)

When someone arrives at an event, conference, or party or logs on to a webinar, forum, or online community, they immediately start looking for cues about how to behave in this context. They will get cues from everyone, especially those in leadership

positions—the welcoming, speakers, hosts, frequent posters, staff, board members, and organizers.

People often imitate the behaviors of these leaders. If the host warmly welcomes them, they are more likely to greet others warmly. If they see lots of fun emojis like 😊 and ❤️, they are likelier to use a friendly tone in their posts. If they see others happily contributing, sharing, or helping, they might be more excited to participate.

Here are two questions to help you articulate the culture you want to see and get you started on spreading those good vibes.

1. What kind of culture/environment/ethos would benefit people the most? *[For example: welcoming, generous, open.]*
2. What behaviors would help create the culture/environment/ethos you expressed above? *[For example: enthusiastic welcomes, warm smiles, personal connections.]*

Pose these questions to yourself if you are the sole leader or use them to spur group discussion in your conference committee, chapter leadership, staff, or board.

Happy engaging!

Would you like to learn more about member engagement? Email Amanda at amanda@amandaleakaiser.com. Amanda will be speaking at MSAE24. Details are available at www.msae.org/2024-annual-conference.



Meet Amanda

AMANDA LEA KAISER is a keynote speaker and author of *Elevating Engagement: Uncommon Strategies for Creating a Thriving Member Community*, which you can find in online bookstores worldwide. Through her research, Amanda is at the forefront of exploring how member and attendee engagement is rapidly changing within professional communities. Get free resources at www.AmandaLeaKaiser.com.