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HOW GRACE BUILDS COMMUNITY

The World's #15 Leadership Guru,
By *John Baldoni*

*A community is a gathering of people for joint purposes.
Like family, they have bonds that bind them together.
Unlike family, they choose to belong.
And in the choice they commit to something better.
How they define better will be both collective and individual.
Collective in the sense of shared values.
Individual in the sense of shared meaning.
Within the community, there is the freedom to belong
As well as the responsibility of belonging.*

Community is essential to the human condition. Fundamental to community is the sense of belonging. Leaders have a special responsibility to nurture belonging. They do it by leading gracefully, which I consider the "catalyst for the greater good."

My interest in grace and community comes from my parents. My father, L. Paul Baldoni, MD, was a family physician who viewed medicine as science and art. Dad studied hard, read the latest medical journals, and kept up with his board certifications. Why? To serve his patients better. My mother, Martha, was a true communitarian. She served as a councilperson and mayor of my hometown of Perrysburg, Ohio. She was also a peace activist and ecumenicalist. My parents' example led me to an early understanding of community. Leading with grace is something each of my parents did in their own way.

As I learned from Mom and Dad, grace can be defined as a form of poise, confidence, and composure that allows a leader to handle difficult situations calmly and tactfully.

Leaders with grace exude an air of steadfast authority and unflappability that has a calming effect and earns people's trust and respect. Grace enables leaders to navigate adversity and confrontation with dignity, creating an environment for open dialogue rather than argumentation.

Grace is a vital quality from within, rooted in solid values and self-assurance, but profoundly influences those around the leader.

Community

Grace enables leaders to build community in several ways:

First, they can create an environment of openness, respect, and trust. Leaders who exhibit grace in their dealings with others make it safe for people to voice concerns, admit mistakes, and retract statements without fear of harsh judgment. This outlook facilitates strong connections.

Second, graceful leaders allow constructive dialogue to occur by giving people room to make mistakes and learn from them. This connection enables more authentic conversations to happen, strengthening bonds within the community.

Third, leaders who maintain confidence and steadfastness even during crises demonstrate their strength of character and earn people's loyalty. They bring teams together to weather any storm by remaining calm and focused. This resilience enables human connections to deepen.

In essence, grace establishes a foundation of mutual understanding and respect on which strong communal ties can thrive. It gives people the confidence to connect wholeheartedly to leaders and each other without fear of recrimination. That is how the best leaders foster robust, supportive communities even in turbulent times.

Genuine connection

Grace facilitates connection, which is essential to building community. Leaders create community in the following ways.



- They are creating an environment of openness, respect, and trust. Leaders who exhibit grace treat people with dignity, give them the benefit of the doubt, and provide "pre-forgiveness" as described. This behavior facilitates solid interpersonal connections and community.
- Allowing constructive dialogue to occur. Grace enables people to make mistakes and retract statements without fear of harsh judgment. This position allows for more open and honest conversations, strengthening connections.
- Projecting confidence and steadfastness even during crises. Grace under pressure demonstrates a leader's commitment and character. Graceful leaders earn people's loyalty and trust by remaining calm and focused. This effort galvanizes teams and stakeholder groups, enabling the human connections vital for weathering storms.

In essence, grace establishes the foundation of respect, resilience, and strength of character that allows authentic interpersonal bonds to form between leaders and stakeholders. It is a facilitator for human connection even during the most challenging circumstances.

Grace gives people the confidence to connect with leaders wholeheartedly without fear of condemnation over inevitable mistakes. That is how grace fosters robust connections in times of crisis and change.

Lesson from Ted Lasso

Community is what we all need now more than ever. Our world is upside down, and the future is unclear, and we all know deep down that we need one another. So we take comfort in the lessons of a fictional television character, Ted Lasso, who says, "If you care about someone, and you got a little love in your heart, there ain't nothing you can't get through together." Community builds upon four principles of sharing.

FOUR PRINCIPLES OF SHARING.



Shared experience. Nothing binds people together more than experiencing hardship. We certainly experienced that feeling during lockdown due to the pandemic. Isolation grew, but so did connections, often fostered by video connections. Organizations that leverage what they have experienced build bonds that contribute to resilience and an ability to weather the subsequent hardship.

Shared knowledge. Good communities are open about what they know and willingly share it. High-performing teams bring new members into the team through their rituals, some humorous, some strict, all important to team cohesion. Underlying is the practice of tacit knowledge, the way we do things here because we know they work.

Shared goals. So often, we hear that individuals from all walks of life need something bigger than themselves to believe in. We want to pull together to achieve an objective, a goal, or even a vision that gives us the feeling that what we do means something. It is purposeful.

Shared success. When a group works hard to achieve what it has achieved, individuals feel good about what they have accomplished. And as with hardship, it fuels them to face the next challenge.

Collaboration

When you build a community – as we saw in the Ted Lasso television series -- you increase the odds of creating collaboration. Here are some suggestions for helping a team learn to collaborate more effectively based on the knowledge provided:

- Select team members wisely. Complementary talents and skills are essential for collaboration. Bring together people with different strengths to get the best results.
- Remember that opposites attract. Pair people with contrasting working styles, perspectives and approaches. Differences spark creativity through constructive tension.
- Focus on building team harmony through open and frequent communication.
- Collaboration emerges when teammates find their rhythm and "voice" together.
- Instill shared values so the team pulls together for the greater good, not just individual interests. Stress that no one is above the team or organization.
- Allow the team to figure things out and execute ideas within guidelines. Creativity serves the mission when balanced with discipline.
- Hold the team accountable for results, both good and bad. Praise creative solutions but ensure they fulfill objectives on time and within budget.

Lead by example, showing how collaboration drives performance. Set a tone of mutual respect and demonstrate ways to challenge one another constructively.

The key is selecting complementary skills, nurturing open dialogue, instilling shared values, permitting creative freedom within clear expectations, and modeling collaborative behavior.

Leading with grace

Leaders with grace show poise, confidence, and composure, which allows a leader to handle difficult situations calmly and tactfully. Leaders with grace exude an air of steadfast authority and unflappability that has a calming effect and earns people's trust and respect.

Grace enables leaders to navigate adversity and confrontation with dignity, creating an environment for open dialogue rather than argumentation. As described, grace is a vital quality from within, rooted in solid values and self-assurance, but profoundly influences those around the leader.

To exude grace, leaders must know themselves profoundly and project steadfast confidence in their values and abilities. Grace comes from within but has an enormous influence on those you lead. With grace, leaders earn loyalty and trust. They inspire others to follow their example and give their best efforts. That is the true power of grace.

Leaders exhibit grace through their behavior.

- Exude calm in tense situations. Take a deep breath before speaking, smile radiantly, and project confidence. This behavior diffuses stress and makes people feel comfortable. Practicing mindfulness helps leaders remain centered.
- Make time for self-reflection. Create a "thinking space" to collect your thoughts and connect with your inner self. Insist your team does the same through sharing reflective practices. This approach nurtures grace.
- Share lessons from your reflections with your team to promote organizational learning and grace. Ask thoughtful questions that encourage people's growth.
- Have confidence in yourself that comes from accomplishments and self-belief, not arrogance. This belief inspires trust in your calm, thoughtful leadership.
- Meet challenges like anger and insults with grace - composure, respect, smiles, generosity. This grace under pressure brings people together behind you.

The key is remaining deeply centered while radiating calm confidence, respect for all, and commitment to growth.

My Community

My interest in community as the subject of a book stems from my recent work on grace, which I define as the catalyst for the greater good. Community arises from people of shared interest coming together for the greater good.

My interest, however, is more deeply felt due to being a member of 100 Coaches, a group of thought leaders and doers from business, academia, and human development disciplines. Over half of us are executive coaches in a formal sense, but all of us, in one way or another, help each other in ways both professional and personal.

100 Coaches is the brainchild of Marshall Goldsmith, often regarded as the world's leading executive coach, an honorific earned through his coaching over 300 CEOs, writing and or editing over 50 books, including four New York Times best-sellers. The idea for this community began with Marshall attending a workshop by Ayse Birsal-Beck. Based upon the principles of her book, *Design the Life You Love*, Ayse inspired Marshall to give away all that he knew to 15 people. As a result, over 18,000 people responded to his initial solicitation, and the group has grown to over 300 members worldwide.

Our intention is to share what you know to help someone improve. It is a notion of paying it forward one person, one community at a time.

We have annual gatherings, but the community emerges from two smaller group concepts. One is the Life Plan Review (LPR). It was developed by Alan Mulally and based upon the Business Plan Review that he made famous while serving as CEO of Ford Motor Company. LPR asks members of the groups, anywhere from four to six or more, to commit their goals to paper and report on their status every week. It is a system of personal accountability that rates the achievement of objectives in three ways: green for progress, yellow for some improvement, and red for no modification.

The other means of community building is The Connect Groups, an idea developed by Rob Nail, Bill Carrier, and John Strelecky. Using John's book, *The Big 5*, members of groups, again anywhere from four to eight, reveal five long or short-term goals related to their professional and personal lives. Next, we share our stories and accept feedback. Then, each member asks for help with one or more goals, and the rest of the group pitches in. The Connect Groups "go deep," as we say, helping others learn more about themselves and their capabilities through storytelling.

Over and above, members of 100 Coaches stay in touch less formally, connecting one-on-one, often sharing our work via social media, and referring one another for work engagements. The purpose of the 100 Coaches is not business-building; it is community-building. We build connections with one another and, in the process, find joy and gratitude in a community founded on making the world a better place for our colleagues, friends, family, and ourselves.

My Virtual Community

One of the ways I am extending my community is through AI. I took the plunge into AI with the launch of the Baldoni Chat Bot, a fusion of AI technology with leadership knowledge and practice. The idea for creating my Chat Bot came from Marshall Goldsmith, often referred to as the world's pre-eminent executive coach and the author of multiple New York Times best-sellers, including *What Got You Here Won't Get You There*, *Triggers*, *Mojo*, and *The Earned Life*.

My Chat Bot brings together my body of work – more than a dozen books, hundreds of articles, and many interviews – to make them accessible and engaging. This approach enables the chatbot to respond with targeted answers to user questions.

My Chat Bot is trained to answer what is relevant to my insights into coaching and leadership development. Now, in its third generation, the chatbot can answer questions more readily and more quickly than I could when chatting.

Therefore, it cannot tell you what time it is, who the president is, or what color the sky is. It can, however, give you answers to questions such as:

- What is the difference between leading and managing?
- How do I lead with purpose?
- How can I influence my peers?
- How do leaders show grace under stress?
- How do I balance compassion and accountability?
- How can I give difficult feedback to employees?
- How do I lead my boss?

Creating the Baldoni Chat Bot has been a team effort. InfluencerKit.ai, founded by I Mahesh M. Thakur, developed and continues to build the Chat Bot. The chief technologist behind InfluenceKit.ai is Pavan Tallapragada.

The Baldoni Chat Bot is my first step with AI. It resides on my website and is available for free. I plan to use it with my senior leader clients as a reference tool to help them coach and teach their people. The Chat Bot also can extend the lessons of my keynote presentations. Looking ahead, HR departments will license Chat Bots from thought leaders as part of their library of personal and professional development tools.

What I learned

Becoming better known is a process of being at the right place at the right time... after doing the following.

- Believe in yourself.
- Focus on how your work is having a positive impact on others.
- Publish your ideas in articles and books and digital formats.
- Create videos that demonstrate how you will communicate.
- Explore AI to see how it can help you develop your ideas and spark new connections.
- Network with colleagues. Find ways to help them succeed.
- Share what you know.
- Have fun. If you are not enjoying the process, try another line of work.

My advice

The work you do now sets up expectations for what you do later. Becoming better known in your field is a process that involves a commitment to your work and your community.

Final Thoughts:

- Lead with Courage
- We see examples of courage all around us.
- People put themselves at risk to help others.
- You show courage by standing up for your people, advocating for their needs, supporting them... and going the extra mile for them.
- You become their champion.
- You extol their deeds. You honor their sacrifice.

- You commend their fortitude.
- Courage is critical.
- Now and for our future.

About John

John Baldoni is an internationally recognized keynote speaker, certified master executive coach and author of 16 books translated into ten languages.

As an executive coach, John works with senior leaders in corporate, nonprofit, and university environments. John provides performance-based coaching that leverages positive behavior change, enabling individuals to lead more purposefully and gracefully under pressure. John focuses on what it takes to lead with compassion, commitment, and courage. John also provides executive advisory services related to vision, strategy, change, communications, and people development.

John's thought leadership is reflected in his writing and choice of media: columns, videos and books. John also integrates piano improvisations into his keynotes, which he illustrates with his still-life photos. John also hosts LinkedIn Live's "GRACE under pressure" interview series. This platform has enabled him to interview more than 230 global business, academic, and thought leaders and doers.



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