

Community

WORDS BY PAM OLLEY

Community: adjective. Common ownership, liability.

Community: noun. People with common interests living in a particular area

The club where I learnt to play tennis as a pre-teen was organized to have all members share in the running of the club. Before each season opened, a roster was distributed assigning every member a date for taking on the role of court supervision or event helper. In addition, all the ladies were assigned a date for helping prepare teas. There was a clear expectation that every member would volunteer some of their time to the smooth running of the club. Of course, you were never assigned to one of these tasks solo.....and as a new member you would always be teamed with a long term member. Through executing your volunteer role, you got to meet other members and became involved in the club. Perhaps because I was introduced to this concept at my first club, I have always assumed that membership carries with it responsibilities beyond those of paying your dues, just as it affords privileges.

Later, when playing in tournaments, all participants were expected to volunteer their time to umpire. Usually the loser of a match was assigned to the following match on the same court, unless another player had volunteered already. There was a generous prize for the player who had done the most umpiring. In this way, every match had an umpire to keep score and overrule any obvious errors, every player became familiar with the rules and how to mark the score and player conduct was generally exemplary.

When I am on a committee or Board, I expect the group to have a clear sense of purpose, to be in existence to accomplish something. As a member, I expect to be encouraged to contribute both at the meeting and outside the meeting. A sense of accomplishment for the group and members seeing their participation as being worthwhile are essential to having an effective committee. To support this, the committee chair must keep the group's focus on the purpose and motivate the members to participate and contribute. The chair should also ensure that the group develops a well understood plan of action with mutually agreed expectations and that there is follow up on progress and recognition of success.

When I look at the state of volunteerism in tennis, I sometimes see situations where, to paraphrase Churchill, never has so much been owed by so many to so few. I see individuals being cajoled into taking on onerous positions of responsibility that they have little hope of fulfilling. I see volunteers who are swamped with too many tasks and no identifiable sources of assistance. I also see people who have high expectations of receiving value or benefits but who have low expectations of what they should contribute in return. It's not surprising that more and more people are rejecting the notion of volunteering to take on responsibilities that at one time were considered to be an honour, like being captain of a team or a member of the executive.

Fortunately there are other examples of club executives and teams who accomplish a great deal and have fun doing it....perhaps their leaders have learnt from the words of Lao Tsu...

"To lead people, walk beside them.....As for the best leaders, the people do not notice their existence. The next best, the people honour and praise. The next, the people fear and the next, the people hate. When the best leader's work is done, the people say "We did it ourselves!"

If we concentrate on developing organizations where community is used as an adjective, hopefully we will build stronger communities, in the meaning of the noun, where tennis is a common interest and endeavour.



**Interested in volunteering at Bayview Village Tennis Club?
Please contact Linda Flodder. Thank-you**