



Community One
Love Your Neighbor

Leadership Development in Neighborhood Revitalization

Were you told as a kid that you could be anything you wanted to be when you grew up? I was. And even though my family was in the low income, and later middle, income bracket, growing up I believed it. It seemed any opportunity was before me if I just worked hard enough, had a big enough vision, and met enough of the right people. What's more, I had parents and a supporting network of relationships, and a position in our culture—namely I was (am) a white male—that truly made it seem like the world was my oyster.

It was quite a shock to my young adult system when I learned that, even in all my privilege, I had significant barriers to achieving what I had envisioned for my life. Some of the barriers were self-inflicted due to poor decisions I made in the formative years between the ages 14-24, but many of the barriers were things I had no control over, especially the relational network I was brought up in and the economic realities of the low-middle class. This is not a sob story for the poor comfortable white guy, but it is the truth. There were significant barriers.

Now imagine someone with the same barriers, but with heaps more added on. Maybe they were told that they would never amount to anything. Maybe their parents did not support their dreams, possibly were not even present, or actually crushed their hopes on a regular basis. Maybe they were born with a color of skin that brought about discrimination, alienation, segregation and other forms of oppression that conveyed the message of second class citizenry. Maybe their network of relationships did not spur them on to greater things, but acted as a vacuum pulling them back. Maybe their economic situation not only served as a barrier to advancement, but acted as a threat to their safety, protection, nutrition, health care, and much more.

These “maybes” are realities for many people living in neighborhoods that need revitalization. While the complexities of the problems listed above can be overwhelming, the solution we advocate for here at Community One is empowerment of residents. We want to empower residents by helping remove as many barriers to success as we can.

Towards this end, one of the first actions we take in Neighborhood Revitalization is leadership development for neighborhood leadership. Once relationship and trust have been established, we have listened to the vision for the neighborhood, and come up with a plan of action to bring the vision into reality, then it is time to equip a leadership team to help lead others to that preferred future.

Leadership is hard. Anyone who has tried to lead a team, organization, or movement knows the difficulties. And everyone has experience with family or self leadership. Along the journey of life we pick up learnings that help us navigate how to lead. Our hope in providing leadership training for neighborhood leaders is to ensure they have the same access to the skills, tools, resources, and teachings that others enjoy. In this way we remove a barrier and empower residents to be the change they desire to see.

Leadership Development in Neighborhood Revitalization happens in two simple steps:

1. **Assessment.** Listening never stops in neighborhood work. We don't want to assume we know what neighborhood leaders need, but instead ask them where they already are, and how they want to move forward. This is another form of empowerment.
2. **Custom Training.** Every neighbor and neighborhood is unique. Once the assessment is complete we shape a leadership track specific to the neighborhood leadership team to best equip them for success in moving the initiative forward.

At this point the ball is in the neighbors' court to utilize the training. Some may choose to not go on the journey of development. However, some will. And all have the opportunity, one that may not have been available to them before. The neighborhood has experienced a step towards empowerment.