

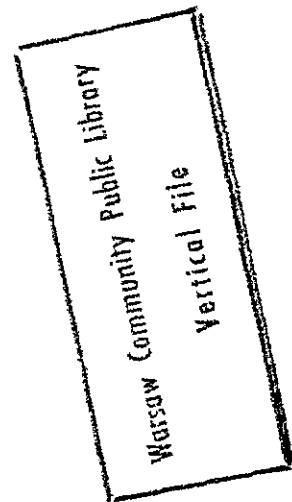
Guidelines
for a
Transition Community

KLA White Paper

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Guidelines for a Transition Community

It doesn't take much to pick up the Times-Union and read about the challenges that face our community on a daily basis. There are a variety of reactions to the problems we read about in the newspaper. We can spend our time and money attempting to protect ourselves from the problems. We can place the responsibility of our problems on our elected officials, lack of funding for additional social services, education, lack of involvement from the potential leaders of our community or the downward spiral from which all communities suffer. Or we can stand up in the midst of all the confusion and concern and choose to be different kinds of people. You see, our community is not some disconnected third party. Our community is compromised of individuals. We respond corporately as individuals. So if we have concerns with how our community is responding to the challenges we face on a daily basis, we must stop and spend time looking in the mirror.

Our intent with this white paper is not to provide a wealth of solutions. Most solutions lie within the individuals involved in the daily activity of living in our community. It would be a futile activity to spend time creating a list of 'to do's' for each of us to follow. This list could never be followed in its entirety nor would those who attempt to follow the list buy into the spirit of the suggestions. The solutions lie within all of us, in the daily decisions we make as we live and interact in this community.

This white paper attempts to paint a picture of the territory of our community. Paintings like other works of art are created through the eyes of the artist. Two artists can paint the same landscape and the end result look distinctly different. Our picture may have a few brush strokes that look like you could have made them. Other strokes may look abstract and out of focus. We create based on how we see the territory, not as the territory truly is. To paint with that much detail would require not only two artists, but thousands of artists, each with their own brushes. This would require more resources and time than is available. As we create our work we ask that you spend your energies looking for the familiar as you realistically consider the whole work. You choose what you take away.

This paper is entitled "Guidelines for a transition community". The term 'transition' connotes the process of changing direction. The directional change is not necessarily an abrupt change but one that moves slightly over time. To carry this thought further, imagine our community heading in a corporate direction. Each of us add some momentum to that direction, intentionally and unintentionally. That flow or direction could be illustrated by a stream flowing within its banks. As new members join our community they enter that stream allowing it to determine the direction they take. If you were to throw a leaf into a stream the stream determines the direction not the leaf. To change the direction of the leaf you must change the flow of the stream. New members are not only transplants from other communities but a larger number of new members are those from within our own community. The high school student, the new parent, the new employee, the new spouse all make choices based on the flow of the stream.

The bed through which a stream flows takes time to create. Years of flowing in the same direction can cut through stone, remove tons of dirt and push obstructions like trees out of its way. Our community has a rich and deep history. Years of choices and corporate direction have embedded the way we move and make choices in our community. In the natural world it takes force to change the direction of a stream. It is difficult to do, but it can be done.

A 'transition' community is a community of individuals, each one making a choice to do things differently regardless of the flow of the stream. Individual choices are driven by the bigger picture of what the community could be if we had the courage to step into the stream. If enough people believed in what could be and had the courage to step into the stream, the direction of the stream could drastically change. It could be forced out of its banks. The stream now flowing in a different direction, would impact everyone who entered it.

A community can try diligently to change the flow of the stream by changing the way they act. But lasting change in a community can never occur unless the character of the individuals in that community is discovered. We all have experienced change in our personal lives which only lasts until the next crisis arises and our true character is revealed. We cannot try harder to be a better community by changing the way we act. We can only be a better community by adhering to those things that don't change, principles. The foundation of principles is the character of each individual.

The creation of a transition community starts with the realization that a community of effective people is grown, not installed. We are a community rich in agricultural heritage. Our forefathers lived by the law of the harvest. They prepared the soil, they planted the right seed, they weeded out those things that choked life from the new plant, they fertilized and they prayed for the right amount of sunshine and rain. They were patient. They knew that the process of natural growth took time and cultivation.

A paradigm shift needs to happen from the way we function within our community to the way we live as individuals. We cannot go for the quick fix. There isn't one. It is a change in approach. Working on making the systems and structures of our community better or more efficient will only bring a small amount of change. In order for lasting change to occur, we must become centered on principles, those things that don't change: integrity, courage, consideration, respect. By focusing on the inside of each of us, change on the outside becomes natural.

This change is a process of maturing from dependence on others and our environment to decide who we are inside. True independence comes when each of us is able to make choices based on our principles not based on what happens to us. All of us as children are born very dependent on our parents for security and for nourishment. The maturing process begins when we realize that, as individuals, we have the ability to make choices. And by making these choices we can choose who we become. Our identity is no longer defined in terms of

who our parents are, but who we are inside. We have the freedom to make minute by minute choices based on who we are.

With the vision of who we are, we begin to establish the direction for our life. We imagine what it would be like to be grown up. We play house and dress up. We answer the question, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" Maturity means we can imagine what we want to be. Our ability to imagine is a powerful gift. Imagination empowers some children who grow up under severe repression and conflict, to become very different people in their adult lives.

When we decide what we want to be when we "grow up" we establish a direction for our life. Direction adds a new dimension. It enables us to distinguish between those things in life that are important and those things that are urgent. Maturity requires us to do those things that are important and to say no to those things that aren't. Importance is defined by the direction we have set for our lives. Urgency is defined by what is immediate not what is important. By managing the things that we do, we can become the people we envision ourselves to be. But without defining the direction, it is impossible to determine if we are doing those things that are getting us closer to who we want to be.

Through the process of accepting responsibility for choices, defining who we are and who we want to be and by doing those important things that contribute to that mission, we truly become independent people. We no longer need the environment, society or individuals to

affirm who we are. As children we long for independence. The freedom to cross the street alone, to go to bed when we want or to pick our friends. A deeper level of maturity occurs when as children we realize we live in a world with other independent people. Our success and survival depends solely on our ability to work interdependently with these independent people.

It is similar to building a house. We start with a vision of what that house might look like, understanding that we have the power to choose exactly how the house will look. We then begin to put that mental description of how we want our house to look on paper. That piece of paper, or blueprint, becomes the basis for how we build the house. We struggle on paper with how we want the entire house to look down to the last detail. We know that when the construction starts, it will be difficult and expensive to change the way we want it to look. After we have the blueprint of our house, the process of efficiently building the house begins. We know that the foundation must be poured first, then the framing of the house, then the roof and so on. The roof cannot be laid before the foundation or walls are up. The important things must be built first. The process of individual maturity is like building a house. We create how our lives will look mentally. Then we create a blueprint or mission for our lives. Based on that mission we do the important things first.

A community is made up of many different houses. Each of us are responsible for the creation and building of our own houses but they are all built next to someone else. We do not live in a community as independent people. We are all interdependent on each other.

This interdependence begins by seeing the world as offering more to all of us, not just providing the opportunity for us as individuals to get more. Success cannot be seen through the eyes of a competitor. If I win, that means someone must lose. Life is not about winning at the expense of others. We must see life ecologically balanced. Everything I do impacts the whole. If I win at the expense of someone else, a small part of the ecology of life is lost.

Maturity is having the mentality that within all my relationships with people I will believe that there is a way for both of us to win. My wants must be communicated in the context of what you want.

The key to interdependent relationships is communication. Our ability to communicate our ideas, hopes, dreams, solutions and desires is unique. True maturity comes when we understand the other person before we attempt to be understood. If we acknowledge the fact that another person's point of view can add to the accuracy of our view, we can truly practice empathic listening. By seeing how others see it we can gain a better understanding of each other. What gets in our way is trying so desperately to be understood. If we would just take the time to listen, we would be able to describe our thoughts and ideas so much more accurately because we would know the type of language to use.

Through this open exchange of ideas and views we can come to a more accurate view of the real picture. Problem solving can function at a higher level because we no longer try to argue for our own solution but we communicate until we both are satisfied that our specific needs

are met. A more creative solution is the result of two independent people working synergistically together.

To continue to mature we must become "lifelong learners", we must continue to establish and clarify our values, we must have a sense of lasting impact and we must love and be loved.

Without these basic needs, we are unable to mature. We must find balance in our ability to interact with people on an interdependent basis. We must continue to renew our own personal ability to contribute to the community.

As a community we must follow the same path toward maturity. We must realize that regardless of our environment we have the freedom to choose our response. Our concerns as a community range from 'will we ever have a new library' to 'will gang activity get worse before my child reaches middle school'. The question each individual in our community must ask themselves is, "Am I spending more time criticizing the actions of others or am I working on those things I have power to change?" What can you do to make a difference? Will you enter the stream?

Where is our community going? What is the direction of the stream? Where do we want it to go? What are we about? What do we believe in? What makes our community different? What do we want the house to look like? These are questions the community must corporately answer. Direction or mission is imperative to know if we are doing those things

that are important. There are some things this community will not be. Do we know what those are?

Are we doing the important things first? Without knowing what direction we are heading in, we can't answer this question. But as soon as we know, we can always measure what we do individually and corporately by comparing what we do to our mission. By asking this simple question, "Does it get us closer to what we want to be as a community?", we are able to determine its importance. If it doesn't get us closer, then don't do it.

Do we see our community as a place where all individuals could have their wants addressed? Do we have groups competing for limited resources? Is it possible to have the attitude that we all can win? If we continue to fight for limited resources we will spend all of our energies acquiring more to be able to do less with it. If we sacrifice our ability to work together as a focused community centered on principles, we sacrifice our existence. We have to buy into the idea that we all can win if we achieve our mission as a community.

What would it mean to have individuals within our community communicating with this one objective in mind: I want to understand you first, before I am understood? The deepest desire of all of us is to be understood. If we could practice this level of communication many of us would realize that most of the time we all want basically the same thing. If that is true, then what would it take to reach a creative solution so both of us can win? Educators want to educate our children. Employers want educated employees. What would it mean for

educators and employers to sit down and do nothing but try to understand the other? Some of that has happened recently with the Education Summit. But we don't think that way much of the time. At every meeting of every community group we need to practice the art of seeking first to understand then to be understood.

If we were to live in a community comprised of transition people, people willing to pay the price to be different this could be a community where we would have to send people away because we didn't have enough room. We have the unique ability as humans to imagine a different way. We may not know exactly how to get there, but if we know where we want to be, then we have a better chance of figuring out the how. We need people to commit to the process of rolling up their pant legs and walking out into the cold stream with the confidence of knowing that their individual choice will make a difference.

The ideas in this paper are from a book written by Dr. Stephen R. Covey, "The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People", Simon and Schuster, 1989.

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