

## Community Leadership

### *Growing an Entrepreneurial Community*

By Don Macke with Ann Chaffin

In our 40-year- plus journey in the field of rural community economic development one truth continues to stand out – community leadership is foundational to growing relevant, thriving, and prosperous communities. Where there is the right kind of community leadership, rural communities typically do so much better when compared to those lacking in this foundational form of leadership. The role of leadership emerges in every community, venture, and organizational story we review or capture. From Tupelo, Mississippi to Ord, Nebraska – leadership is central in these communities' transformation from crisis to success.

#### Introduction

Leadership development is not our expertise area at e2. But we know how important it is in energizing entrepreneurial development. We defer to folks like Milan Wall with the [Heartland for Leadership Development](#), [David Iaquina](#) with Nebraska Wesleyan University and others. Our work in capturing the Ord Story has once again put a spotlight on the all-important role of empowering leaders who create resident agency throughout a community's development undertakings. This paper provides access to our collection of **rural community leadership** resources.

#### Empowering Leadership

For us at e2, empowering leadership is a very specific form of leadership. It is leadership that embraces the 4-H values of...

#### *Never Do to – Avoid Doing For – Always Do With*

Empowering leadership reaches out into the community to engage a wider diversity of residents and is able to let go of control over community decisions. Empowering leadership is the antithesis of the old days when the dominant class of typically older, white men from families with position in the community and leadership (e.g., Mayor, Clergy, etc.), made decisions on behalf on the community.

#### e2's Leadership Collection

As a complement to our **Pathways to Rural Prosperity** podcast [episode](#) featuring David Iaquina and his story capture work in Ord, we have collected a series of writings on the role of unique leadership in growing entrepreneurial communities that are more vibrant and successful over time. We hope you find the following resources helpful in your work in rural community economic development.

We encourage our readers to start with these papers rooted in our massive story capture work of Ord, Nebraska:

- [\*Neighboring, Abundance Mindset, Intentionality and Reconciliation Leadership in Ord and Valley County\*](#) by David Iaquinta
- [\*Ord's Leadership, The Empowering Element\*](#) by Milan Wall
- [\*Who Gets the Credit\*](#) by David Iaquinta
- Robert Stowell, *the Common Thread* by Matthew Hansen *in production*

Supplementing these works are some specific stories from Ord focused on emerging leaders in this rural community in North Central Nebraska:

- [\*Gaylord Boilesen, Home Grown Serial Entrepreneur, Mentor and Community Leader\*](#)
- [\*Jeana and Tanner Hackel and Hackel Construction\*](#)
- [\*Melanie Boden and Jubilee Catering\*](#)
- [\*Nancy Glaubke, Valley County Health Care System\*](#)
- [\*The Ord Story Collection\*](#)

### Resident Agency

In the United States we hate the idea that there may be a class structure. Unfortunately, we are in denial and class structure while possibly less defined and overt, is ever present in our communities, states, and nation. Isabel Wilkerson, in her 2020 widely recognized book – *Caste, The Origins of Our Discontents*, provides persuasive arguments supported by documentation that we have dominant and less dominant castes in America. We may never use the term “caste” in America or only associate it with some concept in India, but In the United States we have a caste system. Empowering leadership breaks down caste lines truly empowering and energizing the fuller diversity of a community to vision, determine and contribute to community building and betterment. In these kinds of communities, residents have **agency** or the ability to identify needs, wants and opportunities, propose actions and enjoy a level playing field of potential community support.

Resources from our [e2 University](#) library collection are also recommended:

- [\*Leaders are Key\*](#)
- [\*Community Coaching\*](#)

### Role of a Community Coach

The term community coaching implies working with the entire community facilitating development efforts. While this is an intentional focus for community coaching, the more strategic role of a **community coach** is to identify empowering leaders and community builders and helping them become more effective and impactful in helping their community pursue smart and transformative change through strategic development. **Community builders** are those in a community who are actively engaged in the development of a community. But because of historic caste roles, they may not see themselves as leaders. When they assume greater agency, they can emerge as powerful and important rural community leaders.

## Concluding Thoughts

For decades Milan Wall with the Heartland Center for Leadership Development has made the case that community leadership is core to why some communities progress while others decline. Our work in nearly every rural region of North America has demonstrated time and time again that **leadership is key**. When the right kind of leadership is committed and engaged, the opportunities for transformative change are dramatically increased.

### Transformative Change Defined

Our world is constantly changing. Rapid change in our natural environment (e.g., climate change and wicked weather), economy and society are the status quo these days. For rural communities to continue to be relevant, competitive, attractive, and prosperous; incremental change is insufficient in most cases. Bigger visions, greater community mobilization and significantly larger investment is required to stand up a strategic development agenda that can empower desired transformative change.

Building community is a 24-7-365 forever job. It requires the right kind the leadership. The same is true for businesses, institutions, nonprofits, and governmental agencies. Smart, effective, efficient, impactful, and sustainable strategic community economic development requires a community to commit to growing leaders and agency among residents in a community.

***Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.***

*Margaret Mead, anthropologist*

What this inspiring quotation does not address is that this group of committed citizens can only empower transformative change when they empower the fullest diversity of community as equals in the process of community building.

## Questions and Additional Information

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