

Transforming Communities from the Inside Out

Three books focus on building holistic communities that work for everyone.

Reviewed by Terrence Fernsler

Community: The Structure of Belonging. By Peter Block. Berrett-Koehler Publishers (bkconnection.com).

Poverty, homelessness, and the environment aren't improving, and the middle class is shrinking. The current system isn't working for most Americans.

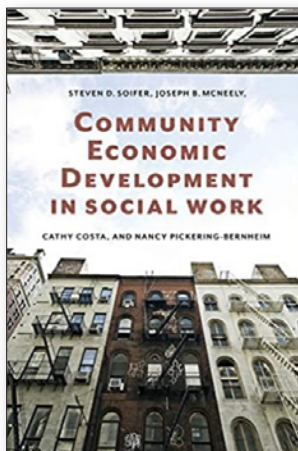
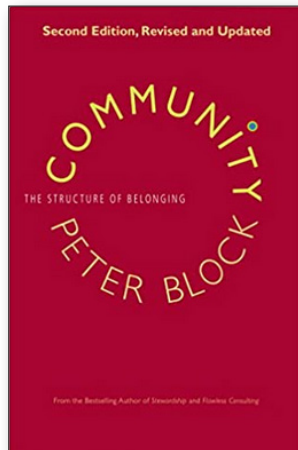
As Peter Block tells us in *Community*, creating a new future means overcoming isolation and self-interest within our communities. Block argues that community is how humans have always resolved social problems, and valuing connectedness will restore community.

The small group is the key to community conversations, because it encourages participation by all. Block deftly explains how to inspire conversation about important questions while honoring diversity and inclusion.

This book is for all of us who care about the health of our communities. It's important reading for anyone who wants to help create an organization, neighborhood, city, and country that work for all – and for anyone who wants to learn how to get there from where we are.

Community Economic Development in Social Work. By Steven Soifer, Joseph McNeely, Cathy Costa, & Nancy Pickering-Bernheim. Columbia University Press (cup.columbia.edu).

Community development is a way for groups to pool resources, build capacity, and balance the influence of community actors, as this book attests. Organizations that join forces in economic development are the nonprofits of the future.

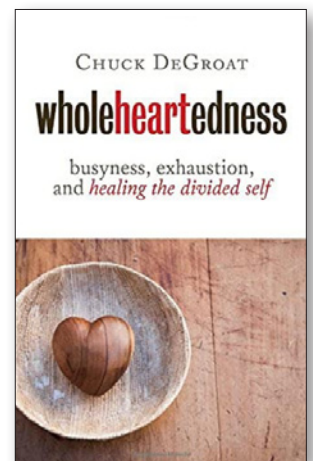



The authors describe successful community efforts already in practice and explain the traits of collaborations that benefit communities in a holistic way. This comprehensive paperback guides nonprofits toward taking the leadership role in these efforts, making it a crucial piece for our time.

Wholeheartedness: Busyness, Exhaustion, & Healing the Divided Self. By Chuck DeGroat. Eerdmans Publishing Company (eerdmans.com).

We're being pulled in so many directions these days that we're often too exhausted to work on the wicked social problems that need to be addressed by our organizations. The result is a growing demand for "wholeness."

In *Wholeheartedness*, Chuck DeGroat investigates division and wholeness, exhaustion and rest, and the drive for perfection through the lens of multiple disciplines. Thinking in terms of wholeness connects us to our communities and helps us participate in more harmonious ways. It allows us to live and work with all our energy, sincerely, meaningfully – wholeheartedly. The connection between wholeness and wholeheartedness is the value of this book.



DeGroat's focus is on the individual. Increasing wholeheartedness as individuals helps our organizations do better. Even more, DeGroat's way of connecting wholeness to wholehearted conduct can be meaningfully applied to organizations (at least relational organizations such as nonprofits) as well as to individuals, providing a broader meaning to our work – that of systemic thinking, commitment, and community building. 

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