

A mature community considers the collective good

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By Mike Butler

When do we know that a community is actually maturing socially, economically and politically?

This reflection is not written from an either-or perspective. A community is neither completely infantile nor fully mature. Instead, the state of communities exist along spectrums and continuums.

What needs to guide our community toward what might be described as a mature civic personality? Static conditions are indicative of decay. Communities, institutions and even our own thinking must continue to move forward in order to persist.

Below are some of the attributes that signal a community is maturing:

A maturing community learns from its mistakes. It recognizes the educational value and wisdom that emerge from failure, disappointment and imperfection.

Communities move away from siloed thinking and practices. There is a growing willingness to cooperate as people recognize that special interests, entrenched opposition and antisocial perspectives hinder progress. More individuals and institutions begin to see through the lens that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

In a maturing community, people strive to ensure that every person knows their voice counts, their thoughts matter, and their humanness is valued. At the same time,

individuals begin to recognize how their gifts, talents, skills and expertise can contribute to the collective good.

Leaders are enthusiastic, wise and serve as load-pulling spirits. They steward communities toward greater cooperation, clearer possibility and a future filled with the qualities of aliveness we all hope to inhabit.

Healthy communities include neighborhoods that are increasingly capable of addressing the challenges they face. Neighborhoods move along a continuum from unhealthy dependency, characterized by passive consumerism of services, toward healthy interdependence.

A maturing community grows in its understanding that every human right is aligned with a social duty. The responsibilities of the individual are proportionally tied to rights shared by the group. Liberty, when unconditioned and uncontrolled, can become self-destructive.

Communities respond to harmful actions in ways that protect safety while maximizing the voice of victims, emphasizing chosen accountability and expanding opportunities for restorative outcomes.

There is an increasing ability to harmonize contrasting perspectives rather than drawing rigid lines in the sand. Differing viewpoints are seen not as threats, but as opportunities to refine understanding. Communities begin to recognize the value of evolved civility.

Community structures, systems and processes become accessible to those who wish to participate in ongoing development. Intelligent, thoughtful regionalizations with our communities, and other levels of government prevails.

Communities that invest in capacity-building services for those who are less fortunate become stronger as a whole.

Local governments begin to recognize the immense social capital that exists within their communities. They develop ways to surface, activate and coordinate this largely dormant resource.

Economic engines begin to operate with both sound business acumen and a commitment to altruism. Profit motives are augmented by service motives.

Communities increasingly honor racial, ethnic and lifestyle differences, recognizing that diverse ideals and perspectives deserve respect.

The way a community uses its collective leisure time becomes an important indicator of maturation. Structured opportunities emerge for people to invest leisure time in ways that enhance communal wellbeing. Leisure produces as well as consumes.

Communities become willing to engage in thoughtful conversations about the ethics of power and influence. While history shows that might has shaped outcomes, maturing communities recognize that might does not determine what is right.

Education continues throughout life. Education is connected to the pursuit of wisdom, the nobility of values and a renewed vision for a higher cultural society.

Religion and spirituality impacts the context of a maturing community. We recognize the goodness, the divinity, the simplicity and the uniqueness of all religions. We are coming of age when unity of spirit is more valued than contrasting theological beliefs, creeds and various ecclesiastical authorities.

Each of these attributes is worthy of deeper exploration. Beginning Feb. 4, the School of Statesmanship, Stewardship, and Service (SOSSAS) will host a series of classes that invite participants to engage personally in the work of evolving our communities. These classes will explore the attributes named here, and others not articulated. You are invited!

To learn more about these upcoming offerings, visit sossas.org.

Mike Butler is former public safety chief and cofounder of School of Statesmanship, Stewardship, and Service.