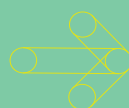




COMMUNITY

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TOOL

create



COMMUNITIES SURVIVE BECAUSE OF THE STRENGTH OF THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THEIR MEMBERS. IN MANY WAYS FAST COMPANY CONTINUES TO THRIVE BECAUSE OF CLOSE CONNECTIONS WITH ITS READERS.

EVERYTHING FAST COMPANY DOES WITH AND FOR THE COMPANY OF FRIENDS DRAWS ON INPUT FROM THE READERS' NETWORK. THE DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT OF EACH NEW SERVICE WE OFFER THE COF INCORPORATES IDEAS AND FEEDBACK FROM COMMUNITY MEMBERS. EVERY IMPROVEMENT WE MAKE TO THE EXISTING ONLINE AND OFFLINE TOOLS IS A DIRECT RESPONSE TO THE CHANGING WANTS AND NEEDS OF NETWORK PARTICIPANTS.

WE ASKED THE LEADERS OF THE COMPANY OF FRIENDS—VOLUNTEER COORDINATORS AND PLANNING COMMITTEE MEMBERS—TO HELP US PREPARE THE COMMUNITY@WORK TOOLBOOK BY SHARING REAL-LIFE STORIES ABOUT THEIR CELL'S HISTORY, GROWTH AND CHANGES, AND SUCCESSES, AS WELL AS ADVICE FOR OTHER COORDINATORS. HERE ARE SOME OF THE MANY RESPONSES FROM COF MEMBERS—A FUN AND INSTRUCTIVE LOOK AT THE STATE OF THE CoF, A VIBRANT, YOUNG, AND GROWING ORGANIZATION.

SETTING THE STAGE



Every successful community has a collective memory from which its members can learn lessons, gain perspective, and draw strength. How do Company of Friends cells begin? Here are several origin stories that illustrate just a few of the ways that the CoF got started around the world.

Early in 2000, a friend and I talked about how we'd like to have more opportunities for stimulating discussion. We particularly wanted opportunities to come together with a diverse group of people. I had previously driven three hours to Minneapolis to participate in their Company of Friends meetings. We decided to introduce CoF to our community.

• **ARLENE ANDERSON SODEN, DULUTH, MN**

People in New Hampshire wanted to organize a local cell instead of joining up with Boston. We piggybacked our meeting with a techie group. Then we met in three principal cities to lessen the inequities of distance.

• **ERIK MURPHY, NEW HAMPSHIRE**

I saw the issue with the title—gold on black—"Quit your job. Work your butt off. Screw up." I found the Web site not long after that and the Company of Friends soon thereafter. I saw that there was no

CoF in my part of the world, and resolved to help to create one. It has been a solo effort fairly much up until now.

• **THOMAS SOUNNESS, PERTH, AUSTRALIA**

I had signed up on the FC Web site and was "unassociated" because there was no local cell. Heath Row was planning the 2000 Roadshow in Europe, and he emailed all the unassociated members who were from Ireland to announce details of his trip. I got the email, and it sat in my inbox for two weeks. Finally I emailed him back and asked how we could go about setting up a cell in Dublin. He wrote back and said, "Great, you're the new cell coordinator." Once the cell's web page was set up, people started signing up for the cell, and we organized our first meeting. Five people attended our first meeting in May and it's slowly growing.

• **JAMES BYRNE, DUBLIN, IRELAND**

THE EARLY DAYS

BACK WHEN FAST COMPANY MAGAZINE WAS BUT A TODDLER AND THE COMPANY OF FRIENDS WAS JUST GETTING OFF THE GROUND, HERE'S WHAT FC HAD TO SAY ABOUT THE COF PHENOMENON.

This Company Just Keeps Growing

What's the fastest-growing company in London, New York, Toronto, Stockholm, and other cities around the world? It just may be the Company of Friends, a grassroots network of FAST COMPANY readers—3,000 strong and growing—who want to share meals, swap ideas, solve problems, and help each other navigate through the new world of work.

Talk about the business revolution! More than 20 cities now boast Company of Friends "cells." Members of the Boston cell, for example, recently spent an evening at FAST COMPANY World Headquarters, where they ate pizza, toured the offices, and stayed until 10 PM.

—Heath Row, FC #16 (August 1998)

A Page of Their Own

The most exciting innovation to emerge from the FAST COMPANY Web site has to be the Company of Friends, a grassroots network of readers from around the world. We neither planned the Company of Friends nor do we pretend to lead it. It emerged independently and has grown from the ground up.

We are, however, doing what we can to make it easier for people to participate. In August, we launched a set of Company of Friends home pages. Local "cells"—from Boston to the Bay Area, Houston to Honolulu—now have their own pages on our Web site. The pages list the times and places of upcoming meetings and offer opportunities for discussion. Some even offer profiles of members.

—Heath Row, FC #17 (September 1998)

The Norwalk cell began when I signed up for CoF at the May 2000 RealTime gathering. I saw that there was no cell in the Fairfield County area, so I became the coordinator. Before attending RealTime, I had received an email from another FAST COMPANY reader in lower Connecticut who saw my name listed on the Call to Action. I figured that if one person had found me through FAST COMPANY, it would be worth having a local cell as a gathering place for other like-minded people in the area, of whom I assumed there were many.

• MARI GUARINO, NORWALK, CT

I liked the magazine, was new to the area, and wanted to meet other people that liked the magazine. I gathered all the email addresses of people registered on the CoF Web site and sent out an email. We had 20 raving FC fans at the first meeting.

• DALE PETERSON, SOUTH FLORIDA

Actually, a few Belgian members had a dinner in 1999 but the group had been quiet until Heath sent us email about his visit to Europe. In the middle of May, seven Belgian CoF members got together and decided to make the Belgium CoF cell active by organizing monthly meetings. CoF Belgium is a friend-help-friend open network that brings people together across industries, functions, and cultures in a safe and relaxing environment for sharing and learning through discussion.

• AGNES HSIAO, BRUSSELS, BELGIUM

My job was not offering me the opportunity to grow and collaborate with fast thinkers. I had been a reader of the magazine for quite some time and had thought about starting a cell in Las Vegas. When Heath visited Las Vegas to attend a conference, I had the opportunity to hook up with him. I finally decided that I should surround myself with other fast thinking individuals who share my vision and passion for change and innovation in the workplace and in business. I looked up all of the members who lived in Las Vegas and contacted them. Ironically, we had our first meeting right after my company eliminated my position. Boy, am I glad I decided to surround myself with like-minded people!

• TAMI BELT, LAS VEGAS, NV

CHANGE



One of the most striking aspects of doing business in the new economy is the feeling that change is a constant.

Company of Friends cells have experienced their own fair share of change, from exploding membership numbers to changing leadership teams.

Since the summer of 1998 the group has been evolving at a rapid rate. We now have close to 525 members, and the list grows daily. Just as with any networking group, not all members are active. There are always new faces at the monthly meetings and a core group of people who show up every time. We now have monthly meetings with a featured speaker. We have frequent happy hours and just held our first benefit at a local art gallery for the Chesapeake Bay Foundation. We have also partnered with a local Netpreneur group and a local university MBA association to hold joint meetings and events. In the fall, we will have a new volunteer activities coordinator and will plan community service activities on select weekends.

• INGRID LOHR, WASHINGTON, DC

Our cell has gone through several stages: formation, growth, near-death, rebirth, growth.

• RAJ MITRA, KANSAS CITY, KS

When I first joined only eight months ago, I think we had 400-500 members at most. Since then, the cell has doubled in size. We have reached a point where we are paving the way to gain non-profit status and to set up an infrastructure to be known in the community via our community out-

reach. Under Brent Hodgkin's leadership, the cell has made a name for itself socially and in the business community because of the high quality workshops it offers. The cell has attracted excellent leaders who are committed to empowering individuals to grow themselves and their business enterprises. There are a number of entrepreneurs in the group, but the mix is very diverse. Our cell has managed to cross all age barriers and has worked to generate consistent programs and has maintained a structured calendar of events while remaining as serendipitous as possible.

• CHARLOTTE CROSWELL MEYER, NEW YORK CITY, NY

When our previous coordinator, Cindy Moeller, left for Cisco Systems in San Jose in 1998, our planning committee met. We decided that I should lead the group as the new coordinator. Selecting someone from within the planning committee is effective because these people are active, dedicated, and enthusiastic about the group. Our cell is growing by about 50 members a month. We have over 760 members as of June 2000. Our growth will force us to address issues such as meeting space, special events, and communication within the cell.

• DANIEL LIMBACH, CHICAGO, IL

CELLULAR GROWTH WITH

How do you manage the growth of a Company of Friends cell without turning the volunteer coordinator role into a part-time job or sacrificing the quality of gatherings and events? Here are the stories of the New York City and London cells, two of the oldest and biggest cells in the readers' network.



New York City

The New York City cell began in April 1998 with about 40 people. Inspired by our founding volunteer coordinator, Patricia Barrett, members gathered to wrestle with a purpose and a sense of direction for such a dynamic group of people. Members were most interested in meeting each other to share experiences, learn, and grow. Over the next few months, the cell broke out into several groups based on interest.

In January 1999, we had our first gathering of people who expressed a sincere desire to be part of building our cell. This was the first meeting of our New York City planning team chaired by Brent Hodgins. To give focus and direction to the organization, the planning team took past input from the cell members and developed a mission statement.

Immediately, new events and workshops began developing on a regular basis. These have included:

- Social nights
- Ron Lieber, FAST COMPANY senior writer, spoke about his book *Upstart Start-Ups*
- Nick Corcodilos, author of *Ask the Headhunter*
- "Branding Me" Myers Briggs workshop
- "Presence & Vision" work/life balance workshop
- "Celebrate Brooklyn" outdoor concert
- Common Ground community service event
- Seth Godin, FAST COMPANY contributor
- Team Building training
- Brand Insight series

In September 1999, Brent Hodgins assumed the role of volunteer coordinator. Shortly afterward, we began developing a simple infrastructure with which to build this rapidly growing organization. Now we have a planning team of about 20 people.

Our cell has grown dramatically and now has 1,000 members. Change has come about on several fronts. The planning team has gone through an evolution. We began as a team of 20 with a lot of dreams for the organization, but we weren't ready to step up and deliver on those dreams. We were having some fun and producing great events, but we had no consistency. Over the next year the planning team became a little too focused on building an infrastructure to support this rapidly growing organization. Suddenly, being on the planning team felt like work; sustaining this growth was not going to be easy.

By December 1999, the team had thinned to about eight people, events had become sporadic, and morale was low. It was time to shake things up. The December planning-team meeting changed everything. We stirred up some emotions, challenged commitments, and challenged each other. By the end, we had a rejuvenated planning team with a new mission and a new focus on fun. The big insight that came out of this meeting: You must take care of the planning team first. The planning team is the nucleus of the cell. If it's hot, the entire cell is hot. If it's off, the entire cell is off. We resolved right there that we'd have more fun and ensure that the team worked like a true team. That has changed everything: Planning Team attendance is up, number of events is up, event attendance is up, positive event feedback is up and we're having fun.

Contributed by Brent Hodgins, New York City, NY

London

The London cell started when someone pulled the email addresses of people who had signed up for CoF off the Web site and emailed them. After about four emails between a dozen people, we met. Peter Feltham (aka "Oink") established a mailing list system, over which future meetings were organized and debate/discussion occurred.

FIRST PHASE: APRIL-JULY 1998

- There were several meeting hosts who presented themselves as case studies with a "problem of the week" on which participants brainstormed for solutions. This was "buzzy" and enjoyable for the consultants who attended.
- Henry Stewart's "Ricard Semler/The Happy Approach" session was a highlight and a benchmark that has not often been matched.
- There was confusion about whether participants saw the Company of Friends as a networking forum or as a learning circle. The second meeting set the tone: This is not a commercial venture. Three months later people became less generous.

SECOND PHASE: AUGUST-OCTOBER 1998

The group went into hibernation for the summer because no one offered to host. Some mailing activity occurred.

THIRD PHASE: NOVEMBER 1998-JANUARY 1999

The group moved towards becoming a learning circle, with topics chosen each fortnight. There were fewer hosts.

FOURTH PHASE: FEBRUARY-MARCH 1999

The group went into hibernation again because of the depths of winter.

FIFTH PHASE: APRIL-SEPTEMBER 1999

- Henry Stewart provided a home at Happy Computers and put a lot of effort into advertising and facilitating the first events of the year to get it kick-started.
- The group kept the learning circle approach, but average attendance has slowed. There has been a decline in preparedness.
- We started working with each other professionally as well as working on the CoF events
- James Shaw started playing a more active role as coordinator.

SIXTH PHASE: SEPTEMBER 1999-NOW!

- We began to get "class acts" for a number of different events—Keith Hammonds and Heath Row from FAST COMPANY, and David Abraham from St. Lukes—and we started doing a wider variety of events: wine tasting, a Christmas party, and a Tom Peters seminar.
- We switched communications tools, moving away from the mailing list Peter had set up to using localcell@fastcompany.com exclusively.
- Having stabilized communications, we still struggled to stabilize event management. That now seems under control. As our credibility has risen, we have been able to book speakers (which really seems to be what our members want) and to do advance publicity.

Contributed by James Shaw, London, United Kingdom



MISSION MAKING

AUSTIN, TEXAS

Manifesto

The Austin Company of Friends is a group of young-minded, professional individuals who are joined by a desire to achieve in the new world of work. We are a team of innovators that believe in sharing the wealth of knowledge that our experience has brought us, without expecting recompense, for the sake of creating a better way of doing business.

We are about change.

We are about acknowledging the ultimate humanity that is inherent in the workplace, and exploring ways to ensure the success of combining life with work.

We are about establishing a network of people who want to work hard, play harder, and ultimately count on each other to help make it happen.

The Rules

This is not a platform to sell. We want you to meet people who can help you succeed. We want you to trade cards, talk about your abilities and, sure, plug yourself. However, we expect you to demonstrate some decorum here. Rather than sending an annoying broadcast e-mail, mingle with other members, find out what they are up to professionally and give out your information selectively.

Look at it this way—We have a one-strike rule. If we feel that you are using the group or the magazine to further your own needs without regard for the effect your actions have on the purpose and ideals of the Company of Friends—you are out. Period.

Spread the knowledge—if you have a good idea, a learning experience, or an issue that needs attention, be willing to share it with others. Big ideas will make this group a big success.

Go out on a limb to change Austin—we are!

NEW YORK CITY, NEW YORK

Mission

Our mission is to build and nurture a community that supports our values by offering excellent, high value-added programs that build capacity in our members to grow personally and professionally and to lead balanced, fulfilling lives; by serving as a bridge to others in transition to our values; by partnering with other organizations to expand the reach of our network and to ensure continuity; and by reaching out in service to less-fortunate residents of the New York City metropolitan area.

TO DETERMINE A SHARED SENSE OF IDENTITY, PURPOSE AND FOCUS, MANY CELLS HAVE WRITTEN MISSION AND VISION STATEMENTS.

Values

- Trust
- Accountability (personal and for the success of the organization)
- Contribution (to the organization; backing up your input with action)
- Desire to question
- Service

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

Chicago Company of Friends is a group of people who share FAST COMPANY'S vision of the revolution taking place in businesses and other organizations around the world. We collaborate using our energy, creativity, and experience to build an inspiring community that challenges all of us to grow personally and professionally through networking, learning from each other, making a meaningful contribution in the community, and having fun.

WASHINGTON, D.C.

FastFriendsDC is a place to make contacts, a catalyst for personal and professional growth, an opportunity to exchange ideas, a casual environment in which to socialize with like-minded professionals, a sounding board for thoughtful exploration, where traditional corporate values meet progressive fast thinking. It is a platform for the cross-pollination of government, business, associations, and free agents, a diverse group open to dynamic expression, a vehicle for learning, and an experience which is always changing.

PHOENIX, ARIZONA

The Phoenix cell of the Company of Friends is dedicated to actively promoting personal growth, professional development, and to raising the standards of business through cooperation and community.

SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA

San Diego Company of Friends cell is a dynamic community of people who enthusiastically support and promote the business philosophies presented in FAST COMPANY magazine. We provide an open forum for discussion of FAST COMPANY ideas. We build community through networking, social interaction, and project participation. We strive to improve our lives and the lives of others by exemplifying 'fast' thinking.

COF IN



CONTEXT

If there is any one characteristic common to all Company of Friends members (apart from reading FAST COMPANY) it is having a full plate. What draws us to this group when time is so scarce? We asked coordinators to describe how the CoF is different from other areas of their lives and the other opportunities they have to participate in business communities.

There is a quality about the CoF that is difficult to pin down—I guess it can be defined as a quality of consciousness that makes this group unique from others. Also, the caliber of intelligence is exceptionally high. There is a genuine desire to support, nurture, enable and empower members to expand their business horizons and potential.

• CHARLOTTE CROSWELL MEYER, NEW YORK CITY, NY

I was attracted to the Company of Friends because I had not found a group that I identified with in my place in business. I found that other organizations in Utah were too local and always fell back to a networking function. Also, although women were in attendance, the management style of meetings was male-dominated and not particularly nurturing. As coordinator, I have tried to shift the focus from the group's power centers and charismatic personalities to meetings that feature listening, empathy, and open discussion. Entrepreneurs in Utah have access resources to but if their business concept is outside the mainstream, there hasn't been a place where they can be heard. The cell has attracted a number of people who want to start a business or who have ideas but didn't know where to start.

• DOUGLAS STEEL, SALT LAKE CITY, UT

Unlike the 900 people who just attended the Tom Peters seminar in New Hampshire (and will never see each other again), the CoF members can get connected, stay connected, and meet month after month.

• ERIK MURPHY, NEW HAMPSHIRE

CoF encompasses all of the good things of traditional organizations, then takes it to another level—one of philosophical community, which is not easy to find in most situations. While you may have topical interests in common with others in professional organizations, it is rare to find "kindred spirits" in such contexts. As a matter of fact, it is rare to find large numbers of kindred spirits in just about any organizational structure.

• MARI GUARINO, NORWALK, CT

I think of the CoF as a classical Socratic discussion group tackling leading-edge subject matter. Networking is a by-product, not a part of the mission.

• MARK NORTHERN, CHATTANOOGA, TN

People don't get hung up on titles or positions. It is a meeting of peers. Innovative approaches are expected and accepted!

• **ARLENE SODEN, DULUTH, MN**

At the moment it feels like the small, annoying little franchise element of an international magazine's marketing strategy, and because of that other organizations are loath to respect or support it. (Yeah, yeah—I know, but that's the feedback I keep getting from the cell members.)

• **THOMAS SOUNNESS, PERTH, AUSTRALIA**

CoF distinguishes itself by the fact that it's not a big waste of time and money. There's so much more to it than just networking and getting together for an excuse to drink. It should be much more meaningful than that and hopefully it is.

• **RODNEY MOORE, NASHVILLE, TN**

It is the most effective networking anywhere, because it's not a "let's see how many cards I can get" type of atmosphere. It is people talking together and helping each other because they want to. It has remained, happily, not a place where people come intending to sell something. It is, instead, where people come to engage and grow and learn from each other. The networking benefits just naturally grow from that.

• **LIN ODOM, ATLANTA, GA**

Compared to other business groups, CoF is democratic, very efficient and user-friendly. For the moment its mission is much too vague: We, the Italian members, need to focus and find a real common interest. I think that CoF is a medium, not a reason. If we do not create a common link it will be hard to succeed.

• **LUDOVICO MAZZA, MILANO, ITALY**

Chambers of Commerce here are old boys clubs in Victorian chambers blue with cigar smoke. At least here in the UK, CoF is a community that represents everything about the new economy (not just the

net economy, either—First Tuesday is a meat market!). We are about inspiration, energy, commitment, vision, connection, community, and sharing.

• **JAMES SHAW, LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM**

Currently I do not see a large difference between the CoF and a traditional networking group. Still, CoF has the opportunity to become one of the more powerful groups on "dealing with the new economy," holding the middle between a self-help organization and a Chamber of Commerce. With all groups focusing purely on the mercantile aspects of the new economy, there is room for a group that enables this, yet recognizes the deeper changes it is causing. Thought leadership is the unique space that CoF can own.

• **ALAIN THYS, BRUSSELS, BELGIUM**

We explicitly state that this is not a networking group. However, that is about as far as we've been able to go. We see it mostly as a forum for exploring ideas and solving problems associated with working life in the new millennium. Thus, it attracts a very select group from many different age groups and professions (from dotcom to trucking) all with a sense of curiosity you won't find elsewhere. We're struggling to give it more "mass appeal." We're actually not sure why! We're not sure if we should be trying to be evangelical about this, or if we should just be content with the way it is. It is, after all, just a magazine... isn't it?

• **TERRY ROCK, CALGARY, AB, CANADA**

It's a volunteer group without any dues. We have avoided the stale format of inviting speakers. Rather, everyone who attends is a participant. We focus on friendship. I've developed a motto that serves as our mantra: "Friends don't let friends go slow." We have some core guidelines about our meetings, such as "Whoever shows up are the right people." We display our guidelines at every meeting. Also, in order to avoid commercial overkill we make it a point to say that we do not see each other as potential clients.

• **ADAM SEAMAN, TULSA, OK**

CoF is very much driven by "giving," which is the opposite of every man/woman/child-for-themselves groups. Reciprocity is a huge element of the Atlanta cell. The grassroots—no governing authority—aspect of the group also distinguishes it from other organizations, as does its global reach. I've visited many cells to collect best practices to apply to our cell.

• **BRANDON PELISSERO, ATLANTA, GA**

CoF is not about networking for the purposes of getting more work, nor is it limited to those in business looking for more business. It is a group of people who have an interest in making a difference in a variety of ways, most often at work or in their organizations, but also in other areas of their lives.

• **SHARON REINER, EDMONTON, AB, CANADA**

Thank God this isn't a "pass out business cards and try to sell each other something" group! While networking goes on (indeed, one person in the group was hired by another member's company), it's on a deeper level. We bounce ideas off of each other. I guess we're not looking for business, but for a more innovative way to do business. Our networking is more intellectual—not just sales-oriented.

• **TAMI BELT, LAS VEGAS, NV**

CoF is less of a social networking group, and more of an idea exchange. We solve problems, counsel each other, and give feedback on a variety of issues. The best thing about the group is that it is flexible. We can change directions on a dime and try new and interesting meeting techniques. Our open space meeting format guarantees that every meeting will be stimulating and valuable to the participants.

• **DANIEL LIMBACH, CHICAGO, IL**

People ask what the group's goal is: Why are we here?—What are we trying to accomplish? We have always said that the goal is to learn new and innovative lessons. This does not seem to be compelling enough of a reason for people to attend.

• **DALE PETERSON, SOUTH FLORIDA**

I see CoF as "organic," meaning that it is living, breathing, changing. It is not constricted by the conventions of any particular organization, political agenda, etc. This frees it to become what it will become, with no expectations.

• **CHUCK MORRIS, KNOXVILLE, TN**

CHALLENGES

MANY OF THE COORDINATORS IDENTIFIED SIMILAR CHALLENGES INVOLVED IN ORGANIZING A CoF CELL.

Getting people to talk is difficult, either through online discussion boards or by email. Everybody gets excited at the meetings then the momentum dies. How do we keep the dialogue going between meetings, and how do we get more of the members to attend meetings?

• **Vann Schaffner, Albuquerque, NM**

Attendance has been unpredictable, even when people RSVP. Also, getting members involved in leadership roles has been difficult.

• **Dale Peterson, South Florida**

I really wish the members would be more involved so we could become a more cohesive group and do something together. I can't even get the members to join online discussions about the things they say they want to learn about.

• **Tami Belt, Las Vegas, NV**

1 It is hard to rely on anyone else. Even our most active members put the CoF pretty low on their priority list. Most of our members are interested but unwilling to put in any work to help the group (such as planning meetings, hosting, or coordinating).

2 I'm skeptical when CoF discusses new projects or work. I have found our members very willing to suggest new ideas (projects, web sites, meeting plans, etc.) but unwilling to chip in and do some amount of the work.

3 It is very hard for us to get an estimate of how many people will attend our meetings. Even though we have an online RSVP form (as well as e-mail announcements of upcoming meetings), members are very lax in responding. I find that several members who RSVP do not show up. Fortunately, new members and some members who did not RSVP do show up.

• **Raj Mitra, Kansas City, KS**

Everyone wants fabulous free programming, but no one wants to do the work. People are booked! Their DayRunners and PalmPilots are filled to capacity. That's always true in Los Angeles—it's doubly true of the FC community.

• **Paula Johnson, LA/Pasadena, CA**

COF AND



ME

COF

One of the central ideas expressed in FAST COMPANY Magazine is that “work is personal.” This idea is echoed in the Company of Friends, a group to which many members turn for inspiration, support, and advice in times of transition and re-evaluation. Here are a few of the responses we received when we asked coordinators to describe the role of CoF in their lives.

FAST COMPANY is my absolute favorite magazine. I am also extremely excited about exchanging ideas with other people who “get” the concepts covered in FAST COMPANY. After my first CoF meeting, I joined the planning committee. It has been a remarkable experience for me. I have met some of the most incredible people through CoF—people with whom I can exchange ideas, have fun, and solve problems. I am a more effective networker, and my communications skills have definitely improved. The greatest treasure I have received has been the people I have met, many of whom are now my friends.

• DANIEL LIMBACH, CHICAGO, IL

CoF has challenged me to not accept the status quo, to say no to corporate America and leave bureaucracies behind. It has broadened my network significantly as a professional and I've found work as a free agent as a result.

• RODNEY MOORE, NASHVILLE, TN

CoF keeps me constantly inspired and challenged and encourages me to break out of the norm wherever possible. It has also had a tangible impact in that cell members helped me change

careers. I announced at a meeting that I was looking for opportunities, and within a week I had more to choose from than at a buffet at a Chinese restaurant. • LIN ODOM, ATLANTA, GA

It's amazing! I can take a lot of my business problems to the group and get results. We run our weekday meetings in an open space format so the agenda isn't defined beforehand, and people bring challenges, ideas or topics they'd like to hash out. It's also a huge help with my work-life balance because we go out for dinner after the meetings and really get a chance to get to know the other members of the cell, which is great!

• PENELOPE WOODWARD, VANCOUVER, BC, CANADA

I leave our monthly meetings feeling energized, even when I arrive feeling weary!

• MARK DAVIDSON, SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA

I believe the group has had an enormous effect on both my work and my personal life. I'm more confident in facilitating meetings and networking. I also have made some good friends and professional contacts. • INGRID LOHR, WASHINGTON, DC

SUCCESS



STORIES

What is the coolest thing your cell has done so far? When we asked coordinators to describe their “big successes” they came back with some stories that surprised us.

Since launch, the best thing that we've done is to attend a certification session for a nonprofit called bizworld.org. It is a program for teaching kids in 5th and 6th grade about the world of business, including venture capital, designing and building a product and then selling your product. Several of us who attended saw a great opportunity to teach young kids about the world of business.

• PETER HIGGINS, NORTHERN VIRGINIA

The turnout for the first meeting was great. We recruited some “ringers” to the group who have since added a lot to the discussions. We are also planning a baseball outing for July. The general manager of the local AA Reds franchise will talk to us about the “state of the art” in professional sports, and then we'll sit down to watch a ballgame in Chattanooga's new BellSouth Park.

• MARK NORTHERN, CHATTANOOGA, TN

We had an open space meeting as one of our monthly meetings with a theme of “Designing the Life You Want”—great attendance, good discussions, and lots of positive feedback.

• CHRIS CAROSELLA, ST. LOUIS, MO

The Secretary of the New Mexico Department of Economic Development is coming to our next meeting to discuss his vision for New Mexico, which is in draft form and undergoing a public review-and-feedback process.

• VANN SCHAFFNER, ALBUQUERQUE, NM

Karen Van Dyke's leadership was the catalyst for our cell's highly successful event during RealTime Orlando. The synergy of our group has enabled us to really move forward with our work on the Call to Action, which will address the digital divide.

• DIANA MITCHELL, ORLANDO, FL

Our creativity meeting was a lot of fun. I think it really spurred a lot of people to change the way they think about everyday things. We had great contributions from a number of different folks (new ones as well), and I think nearly everyone bounced out of the room.

• TERRY ROCK, CALGARY, AB, CANADA

The big event during the Roadshow was by far the best. The quantity and caliber of people was outstanding. Nobody wanted to leave. The presentations were fast-paced and good and the networking time was tremendous.

• DALE PETERSON, SOUTH FLORIDA

Our cell has brought people together so that they can create something new and exciting. Several splinter groups have formed out of the Chicago CoF. For example, the Consultant's Guild was formed by a group of ChiCoF members.

• DANIEL LIMBACH, CHICAGO, IL

GIVING → BACK

It takes a BIZvillage

While many Company of Friends cells are working on projects that give back to local communities, the Phoenix cell is working to encourage local companies that do their own giving back. The group has created the Delta Vee Award and will name the first recipient of the award this fall. Named after the scientific symbol for change in velocity, the award goes to a local business that does good while also doing well. “Businesses, like people, need to be recognized for doing good work,” says Ken Keberle, 39, the cell’s coordinator, who is a manager at DelRiko Custom Fabric Design and Manufacturing. FAST COMPANY talked to Keberle about linking businesses to their communities, about applying “chaos” to fabric making, and about boosting people’s potential.

WHAT ARE YOU WORKING ON?

“My ‘Wow Project’ is called BizVillage. Paul Nixon, a fellow CoF member, and I are building an online network that will link the business community to volunteer efforts. Right now, we’re establishing BizVillage as a valuable business resource. The next step will involve an interactive database that will show how businesspeople can be a vital resource to people outside the business world.”

FAVORITE FC STORY

“About a year ago, FC ran a story about a John Deere plant (“John Deere Runs on Chaos,” November 1998). Like Deere, DelRiko deals in multiples—variations on a theme. The number of ways that you can make a diesel engine is much greater than the number of ways that you can make an engine cover or a 320-square-foot wall tent. But in each case, you have lots of options, all based on a single, basic product design. After reading that piece, I changed our manufacturing process so that it matches Deere’s in certain ways. We make custom products, but by standardizing sizes and angles, we’ve been able to streamline our production process quite a bit.”

GUIDING PRINCIPLE

“I want to do stuff well, but even more important, I want to do the right stuff for the right people. I used to be a bicycle mechanic. I traveled around the world, fixing bikes for bike racers. Do you know how much glory there is in that gig? Not much. But do you know how it feels to hear the national anthem being played after a race? It feels pretty cool. You say to yourself, ‘I did that. He rode the bike, but I got him there.’ I want to give people the benefit of the doubt. I want to give them my best effort and the opportunity to do good work.”

—Heath Row, FC #28 (October 1999)

Coordinates: Ken Keberle, kenkeberle@aol.com; BizVillage, www.bizvillage.com

Giving Back in the Big Apple

Getting some of the busiest people in one of the world’s busiest cities to take time out of their busy schedules is no easy task. But last May, Laura Rubin got about 15 fellow members of the New York City CoF cell to prepare and serve a spaghetti supper for 100 people at Common Ground Community, a low-income housing facility in Manhattan. The facility is home to 650 people—including artists, actors, and formerly homeless people who are being trained for meaningful work.

“For most of us, giving back is far down on our To Do list,” says Rubin, 26, a writer in the marketing department at Ernst & Young. “But service needs to be a strong part of the Company of Friends.” The next step: a mentoring program in which cell associates will team up with Common Ground residents.

So how does Rubin get hyperbusy New Yorkers to make such a commitment? The key, she says, is to take some of the work out of doing good works. After asking other cell members for suggestions on which organization to help, Rubin organized the Common Ground event and then invited people to join her. “A lot of people want to volunteer, but they aren’t able to put the effort into finding the right opportunity. I try to take the red tape out of volunteering.”

—Heath Row FC #27 (September 1999)

The Big Brush Off

After a November 1999 LA/Pasadena Company of Friends cell meeting—where members expressed a desire to perform meaningful volunteer work—coordinator Paula Johnson found the right opportunity: a one-day commitment to rehabilitate the homes of low-income, elderly or disabled Pasadena residents.

The Pasadena program is part of Christmas in April USA, a Washington, DC-based organization that improves thousands of homes each year with volunteer labor and donated supplies. Christmas in April provided safer living conditions for 49,000 children in 1999 alone.

On April 29, as part of the tenth annual rebuilding day, some 30 Company of Friends members joined volunteers in more than 600 cities by painting the small home of Jewel Edwards, a retired cook whose osteoarthritis limits her mobility. The team also installed new flooring in her kitchen and laundry and rebuilt one wall of her garage.

Months before the members of the LA/Pasadena and LA/Westside cells came together to play Bob Vila, “house captains” Johnson and Joseph Lightfoot—a former general contractor—spent hours attending meetings, evaluating the house, and creating a work plan.

“Christmas in April is structured perfectly for Company of Friends cells,” says Johnson. “The project brings a variety of personalities together for a clear common goal. Spending 9 or 10 hours learning and working with people lets you connect in a whole new way.”

—Paula Johnson

Coordinates: Paula Johnson, 76106.3661@compuserve.com; Joseph Lightfoot, Joseph@lightfoot.com; Christmas in April USA, www.christmasinapril.org.

ORGANIZATIONAL



STRUCTURE + STRATEGY

At some point, all the visions, missions, and plans in the world aren't going to stand in for some good old "how-to."

Here are some ideas on how to approach planning a meeting, dealing with finances, spreading the word, and keeping in touch.

The major thing is to get good people involved who are as interested in playing a strategic role in the cell as the coordinators are. For me, it got to the point where my involvement was almost equivalent to a part-time job, so I made a list of everything that I did. At a strategic planning session to talk about where the cell was going, I took the opportunity to spell out all the "tasks"—and they were all picked up by different people! So now we basically have a mini-organizing committee running the cell!

• **PENELOPE WOODWARD, VANCOUVER, BC, CANADA**

- 1 Develop a planning team (as small as two members)
- 2 Take the pulse of your cell (survey, anecdotal)
- 3 Articulate a compelling vision
- 4 Deliver events/curricula that bring this vision to life
- 5 Publicity: Bring a PR professional on board

• **BRENT HODGINS, NEW YORK CITY, NY**

Communicate with the members regularly, and do everything in your power to help them achieve their goals. I exchange over 50 emails a month with members who are looking for information, or have questions about the group. It's important to respond in a timely manner, and follow through with promises. It's also been very effective for me to inject my personality onto my role as coordinator. I'm not just an administrator organizing meetings. People see how passionate I am about this organization, and they respond well to this. If it's not a labor of love, don't do it. This will not make anyone rich, but it is great for building quality contacts. CoF is a catalyst for great things.

• **DANIEL LIMBACH, CHICAGO, IL**

Finances? We don't need no stinking finances! We do everything on user-pay. We use free spaces to meet and everyone brings their own beer! This may change when we organize a larger event, but even then, I think it could be done for nothing.

• **TERRY ROCK, CALGARY, AB, CANADA**

Place notices in community rags, bookstores, on college campuses, and at community centers. Ensuring diverse membership is key to a synergistic group.

• **DIANA MITCHELL, ORLANDO, FL**

We keep it low key and don't even use the word "member." We invite people to come if and when they choose. If it works for people, they will stay involved. (Get in conversation with attendees and co-create the group.)

• **ARLENE SODEN, DULUTH, MN**

Give the group what they want. We always solicit break-out session topics from attendees. Also, we rotate meeting locations to showcase a variety of industries and geographies. We love seeing new places and faces!

• **BRANDON PELISSERO, ATLANTA, GA**

We create energy and dynamism in our communication tools, we have a local Web site to encourage frequent and local contact (www.fasthouston.com), and every quarter we leave our normal meeting place and go on a fast field trip to an exciting location, company or event in the city.

• **TIM QUINN, HOUSTON, TX**

If you have excellent programs and put on fun social events you won't have to recruit—people will come to you. Provide value and growth opportunities and relevance to people's lives. There is a hunger for a healthy place to nurture the mind and soul as well as commerce.

• **CHARLOTTE CROSWELL MEYER, NEW YORK CITY, NY**

Pitch the local media for a feature and send out your news releases, but don't expect too much. Make each meeting an inclusive, engaging experience and people will return with their friends.

• **PAULA JOHNSON, LA/PASADENA, CA**

CoF Connections

As an active member in the high-tech community, I've experienced great success with generating synergy between various groups. I'm president of the Association for Multimedia Communications, and have opportunities to bring groups and ideas together, which is effective and advantageous for all parties. • **DANIEL LIMBACH, CHICAGO, IL**

Recently, as I planned a move to New York City, I contacted someone from the New York CoF listing via email and we had a marvelous dinner conversation. We would not have met in any other way... Now I have found a new friend in a big, strange city! We met for dinner again on my most recent trip to NYC. • **ARLENE SODEN, DULUTH, MN**

It Takes a (Global) Village

People who sign up for the Company of Friends or for a Fast Talk online forum know the rules: no spam, no generic networking nonsense. But that doesn't mean that people don't use CoF and Fast Talk to pursue business goals. Indeed, participants have found partners and clients through the FAST COMPANY network—in some cases, halfway around the world.

Last February, Mario Vittone, 34, president of Rader Technical Education Center, a technical-education provider in Virginia Beach, Virginia, signed on to Fast Talk with the hope of finding ideas for his company's Web site. In the 'Start Ups' forum, he met Tanadi Santoso, 39, CEO of sam-design.com, a firm based in Surabaya, Indonesia. Santoso offered to take a stab at designing the site—and Vittone liked the result.

Today, sam-design.com designs all of Rader's online content and collateral material, and plans are in the works to open a sam-design.com office in the United States, as well as a training center for Rader in Indonesia. "I work with 64 other partners. I'd trade all of them away tomorrow if I could keep working with sam-design.com," Vittone says. Santoso says that his partnership with Vittone has helped his firm to push its creative boundaries—despite cultural differences. "We owe our success to Mario's belief in us," Santoso says. "Even when we've doubted ourselves, he's shown faith in us."

—Heath Row FC #33 (April 2000)

Coordinates: Mario Vittone, mvittone@radertec.com;
Tanadi Santoso, santoso@sam-design.com

A YEUNG ONE...



Felix Yeung, 23, had been in the world of work for less than a year when he volunteered to coordinate the San Francisco Bay Area Company of Friends cell. Now, several months and several meetings later, the cell is thriving under his care.

"This is my first networking group. It is also the first time I've tried to organize something like this, so I'm learning as I go along," says Yeung, who is an account associate for Niehaus Ryan Wong Inc., a San Francisco-based high-tech PR firm. "These are people who really enjoy ideas. That makes it a lot of fun for me."

The group emerged after Yeung and other San Francisco-based Fast Company subscribers started exchanging email about the magazine. At their initial meeting, Yeung volunteered to organize the gatherings. The meetings offer real benefits, Yeung says. "Fast Company publishes a lot of great ideas. But what do individual readers do with those ideas after they put the magazine down? The group gives us a chance to discuss these ideas and to figure out how to make them come to life."

—Tricia Tomiyoshi FC #18, (October 1998)

... GROWS UP

Fast Company recently caught up with Felix Yeung to find out what he's learned from his experiences as a Company of Friends volunteer coordinator.

HOW HAS YOUR CELL GROWN AND CHANGED SINCE THE EARLY DAYS?

We were really lucky—our first cell event was a big success. It got people excited and helped us build some buzz around what we were doing. Since then, we've grown into a featured-speaker format that usually draws between 60 and 70

people. We have been able to draw a higher caliber of speakers—people have begun to count on us to deliver really solid events. We have grown from 100 to 200 members to more than 450 members. Our steering committee has expanded from 2 to 10 active leaders. Now I think of that first event as a chicken-and-egg-proposition: You need people to make a buzz-building event happen, but it's difficult to recruit leaders without the kind of excitement that comes from a good event.

BESIDES BEING LUCKY, HOW SHOULD NEW COORDINATORS APPROACH THE CHALLENGE OF THEIR FIRST EVENTS?

The three most important elements of a new CoF cell are the vision, the steering committee, and the plan. You really need to have these in place before the first event so that your structure is built in. If you aren't able to recruit people for a steering committee right away, try writing a really clear plan of your vision for a potential Company of Friends cell. Use this vision as a sales document to get other people on board.

WHAT ARE THE MOST SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES THAT YOU'VE ENCOUNTERED AS A VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR?

A big issue for us is member-relationship management. We don't have a way to track how people are interacting with our events, our emails, or our online tools. We have started to hand out event-evaluation forms after every meeting in order to gauge who was there, why they came, and what

they got out of it. The forms have been welcomed, and the data have helped us to focus our plans and to describe our audience more precisely to sponsors.

Another issue is that people flake out very easily. Even when we get 100 RSVPs, only 40 will show up. This problem ties into a larger issue: the Company of Friends isn't very high on everyone's priority lists. We want to continue to raise the quality of our programs so that people will follow through on their interest in the group.

HOW HAVE YOU USED THE ONLINE TOOLS OFFERED BY THE COMPANY OF FRIENDS WEB SITE?

I love the Action Pack. I was actually able to land the president of Jamba Juice as a speaker through information provided in the Connexus section. It's a great way for me to keep up my flow of speakers. The new "heathbot" feature has been effective in welcoming new members. I have chosen not to use the local cell mailing list, because other mailing-list and RSVP services seem to work better. The discussion boards don't seem to be very effective—people aren't interested in taking the active step of going to the discussion; they would rather have it come to them in the form of an email digest.

WHAT'S ONE OF THE COOLEST IDEAS THAT YOUR CELL HAS USED IN DESIGNING ITS MEETINGS?

We've started to incorporate a "business-matching" segment. We draw business cards at the end of every event for the chance to give a free two-slide presentation about their company at the next meeting. This keeps people coming back. It also helps us keep tabs on who comes to the events, while keeping everyone up-to-date about other members' involvements.

—David Rosenblatt

COMPANY of MENTORS

The Company of Friends has grown so quickly that it's not unusual for more than half of the attendees at a cell event to be new members. Not surprisingly, it can be hard for cell associates to get to know one another well.

One cell, in San Diego, California, is overcoming that challenge by treating associates not as members but as mentors. This spring, the cell launched a program, called Mentor of the Month, in which 20 associates are paired with fellow cell members. But this isn't traditional mentoring—it's peer-to-peer mentoring: The 20 associates make up 10 mentor teams, and the teams change every month.

One team paired Alex Yates, 26, a graduate student at San Diego State University's School of Communication, with Marcia Bradley, 46, marketing manager for culture-change projects at British Airways. "To help launch Marcia's speaking career, we hope to use the knowledge and resources that I gained when I interned at a speaker's bureau," says Yates. "I tagged along to catch her talk to some business leaders at UCLA's Anderson School of Management, and when I heard her speak, I could tell that she has what it takes to do well as a speaker. We may not get around to working on her speaking skills until a few months from now—when we'll both have other mentor partners—but that's fine. We've laid the groundwork for a long-term relationship."

—Heath Row, FC # 25 (June 1999)

CoF ReBoot

Sometimes it is best to take a breather and then re-launch your cell with a fresh perspective and new energy. A number of cells have tried this strategy with good results.

We met for about 6 months, and then called 3-month hiatus. Attendance never grew to more than a dozen or so, and few were “regular” attendees. We regrouped with an additional 3-4 new people as a planning committee, and re-launched about 4 months ago. We are now seeing some interest and growth—and more activity on the local chat area on the site.

• GREG KITTINGER, TULSA, OK

Our high point was participating in Heath’s Roadshow. We had a “Big Event” that pulled a crowd of more than 60 people. The attendees were an excellent and diverse group of people whom we hoped would get actively involved. I personally got depressed after the next meeting when we had 45 people RSVP and only 10 show up. The momentum from the big event was lost, as was my enthusiasm for leading the group. At the beginning of 2000 I thought it was important to have a change in leadership. We needed new ideas and new energy. I was unable to recruit any of the members to take over the responsibility—even as a team. So after the March meeting we put the group on hiatus. A couple of people are working on an August meeting with a different format. I hope they will pull it off. If that falls through I will likely try to start again with a quarterly meeting, rather than monthly—and with a different format.

• DALE PETERSON, SOUTH FLORIDA

We think that our re-launch event is going to be gangbusters. We are launching an interactive speaker series in which we’re inviting people from Calgary’s fast companies (as nominated by cell members) to interact with us in various locales (their workplace, restaurants, etc.). Great response so far.

• TERRY ROCK, CALGARY, AB, CANADA

In the Spring of 1999 I signed up for the CoF. I noticed that about 10 other people in Tulsa signed up, but that a cell had not been established. I messaged the other CoF people in Tulsa and several indicated interest in meeting. We met for about 8 months in 1999 and consistently had about 6-10 people attend, but it was always different people. It didn’t seem like we were creating a solid and consistent community, so I called for a “lights out” period to regroup. After a few months I called 4 of the most interested members and asked them to serve on a leadership committee. We met and decided to create the kind of meetings that the five of us would like to attend ourselves. Whoever wanted to join us could do so. We called this our “reboot.” Since then, we’ve met 2 times and our third meeting is next week.

• ADAM SEAMAN, TULSA, OK

FUTURE

Now is the time for thinking all the big, crazy thoughts and making solid, exciting plans for the future of the Company of Friends. Check out these ideas for the future, then add your own.

In my perfect world, CoF association would have the same instant recognition as being P&G alumni—saying you’re associated with the CoF would send an instant (positive!) signal about work ethic and work values.

• JENNIFER LARKEY, MEMPHIS, TN

We do notice a shift in the spirit of the cell—the excitement around the innovation of magazine has worn off. People are no longer as excited about the magazine as they were two years ago. What was once an innovation is now, although great, another magazine. Given this insight, it is key that the cell be able to sustain itself “outside” of the magazine. By that I do not mean independent of, but rather that the cell be about the people and the events—not solely about the magazine.

• BRENT HODGINS, NEW YORK CITY, NY

We’ve begun talking about some master mind groups, and adventure/team building programs. We are developing a plan for e-noticing each other about upcoming area programs that feature innovators.

• DIANA MITCHELL, ORLANDO, FL

I would love to have numerous, self-directed, mini-cells that meet all over the Twin Cities.

• CHUCK PRESCOTT, MINNEAPOLIS-ST.PAUL, MN

I would love to see our cell grow to around 50-100 members so that we can hold regular meetings, create a strategic vision, and also provide a great networking environment for the members.

• MARI GUARINO, NORWALK, CT

I would like to see our group become more involved with the community—either by mentoring, community service or by forming a creative-solution incubator for local businesses.

• TAMI BELT, LAS VEGAS, NV

In the future, our group hopes to be a catalyst for business community involvement and actually lead the charge locally on issues important to Knoxville’s future and the viability/vitality of business here.

• CHUCK MORRIS, KNOXVILLE, TN

In five years, I think that this will be a highly respected, high-profile networking group. People will view the group as a springboard to great things: test out a business idea, get some career feedback, find a business partner, or revitalize a languishing business. It will be a prominent resource for entrepreneurs and businesspeople in general.

• DANIEL LIMBACH, CHICAGO, IL



IDEAS

THE COMPANY OF FRIENDS IS WHAT YOU MAKE IT. CELL LEADERS OFFER SOME GREAT IDEAS FOR GIVING THE CoF THEIR OWN SPECIAL TOUCH.

Be a tireless promoter of the group. Be as visible as possible. Join several organizations and cross-pollinate. You cannot effectively run a cell if you are in a vacuum.

• DANIEL LIMBACH, CHICAGO, IL

Coordinators need a start-up kit. This could consist of a box that contains the tools needed to run a cell effectively.

• PETER HIGGINS, NORTHERN VIRGINIA

For young or struggling cells, survey the members about what they want: where to meet, when to meet, how long to meet, and who would like to help. A lot of people are willing to help, as long as you are willing to ask for it!

• ERNIE DEGRAW, CHARLOTTE, NC

I hope that our cell can serve as a "training cell" for potential leaders in nearby areas. They hang with us for a while, then start new cells!

• PAULA JOHNSON, LA/PASADENA, CA

Go into your newsstand and stick a photocopied flier about your cell in every copy of FAST COMPANY on the shelf!

• JAMES SHAW, LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM

I want to plan field trips to meet other groups and attend their meetings.

• TAMI BELT, LAS VEGAS, NV

I compiled a directory of member "wants" and "offers" to help people get to know each other. One woman wanted partners for conversational French practice. She got 'em!

• PAULA JOHNSON, LA/PASADENA, CA

GETTING (IT) TOGETHER

Sometimes there's more to organizing a CoF meeting than meets the eye.

Last summer, for example, the Washington, DC cell organized a Webcast panel discussion about leadership challenges in fast-growth organizations. Partnering with TV on the Web and with the Fast Growth Network, the cell brought together executives from two area businesses for an hour-long discussion about managing growth.

"The event was set up so that cell members could learn from the movers and shakers at some of DC's fast companies," says Lisa Jane O'Neil, 28, volunteer coordinator for the DC cell. "It helped establish our cell as an alternative-networking forum in the nation's capital."

Meanwhile, in Toronto, a group of 10 cell associates organized a daylong open-space gathering that focused on how attendees could "transform the world of work and design the life you love." This "un-conference" drew more than 150 people from the Toronto area. After collaboratively selecting topics for the day's agenda, attendees proceeded to lead their own discussions. Among the themes they explored were styles of learning, the meaning of money, and the importance of workplace relationships. "What impressed me was the inclusive nature of how we created meaning together," says Davender Gupta, 36, a business coach who helped organize the event. "The networking was person-to-person, rather than persona-to-persona. We're creating more than just a network of business associates."

Heath Row, FC #21 (October 1999)

Coordinates: DC cell Webcast, www.tvontheweb.com

Toronto cell 'un-conference,' www.fctoronto.com