

The Importance of Being in Third Place

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Introduction

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What is a "Third Place"

A third place is a space that is neither home nor work but feels like your own. It offers a setting for shared presence, connection, and community without roles or expectations. In today's remote and isolated world, third places are crucial for fostering community and social interaction.

The concept was summed up beautifully by two of the greatest poet-songwriters of the 20th century,

Gary Portnoy and Judy Hart Angelo

The Loneliness Epidemic and Decline of Third Places



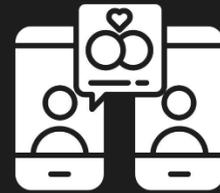
Decline of Third Places

Since the 1960s, America has seen a significant decline in third places.



Fewer Close Friends

Americans have fewer close friends and belong to fewer groups now.



Decreased Participation

PTA attendance, club memberships, and social gatherings have all decreased.



Health Risks

Loneliness is linked to higher rates of anxiety, depression, and early death. On par with smoking and obesity



Surgeon General's Warning

Dr. Vivek Murthy stated, 'the mortality impact of social disconnection is severe.'

Decline in Community and Its Impact

Decrease in Social Capital

The diminishing presence of community organizations has resulted in a notable decrease in social capital.

Deterioration of Relationships

With fewer opportunities for community engagement, personal relationships deteriorate, leading to isolation.

Loss of Gathering Spots

The reduction of informal gathering spots has been associated with a decline in trust and collaboration.

Rise of Online Interactions

These shifts have led to online interactions often lacking the richness of in-person relationships.

Loneliness isn't always obvious.

Waldinger's Social-fitness Checklist

| Keystone | Guiding Questions |
|---|--|
| Safety & Security | <i>Who would you call if you woke up scared in the middle of the night? Who would you turn to in a crisis?</i> |
| Learning & Growth | <i>Who encourages you to try new things, take chances, or pursue your goals?</i> |
| Emotional closeness & confiding | <i>Who knows everything (or most things) about you? Whom can you talk to honestly when you're feeling low?</i> |
| Identity affirmation & shared experience | Is there someone who has shared many life experiences with you and helps you stay grounded in who you are? |
| Romantic intimacy | <i>Do you feel satisfied with the amount of romantic intimacy in your life?</i> |
| Help (informational & practical) | <i>Who do you turn to when you need expertise or hands-on help solving a problem?</i> |
| Fun & relaxation | <i>Who makes you laugh and feel at ease—who could you invite to a movie or road-trip?</i> |

If those questions feel hard to answer,
you're not broken. You're not weird.



As a child, I always wondered what was so horrible about "Solitary Confinement"

Loneliness in the Cybersecurity Community

Neurodivergent Individuals

The cybersecurity field often attracts neurodivergent individuals, such as those with ADHD or autism, who may already feel isolated.

Outsider Feelings

Many professionals in this field were not part of popular groups in school, leading to feelings of being outsiders.

Solitary Work

The solitary nature of cybersecurity work can further exacerbate feelings of loneliness and disconnection.

Robert Putnam's Study on Social Capital



Regional Governments

Italy created 20 new regional governments in the 1970s.



Choral Societies

Regions with more choral societies had better-functioning governments.



Civic Engagement

More civic engagement led to communities functioning better overall.



Local Economies

Strong local economies and efficient institutions were evident.

Causation, Not Just Correlation

01

Civic Engagement

Communities with civic engagement show improved functionality and cooperation among residents.

02

Voter Turnout

Higher voter turnout is associated with increased participation in community activities.

03

Social Capital

Social capital serves as vital infrastructure for fostering collaboration and cooperation.

04

Neighborhood Trust

Casual acquaintance leads to information sharing and mutual problem-solving among neighbors.

Effects on Communities



Crime Reduction

Lower crime rates



Corruption Decrease

Less corruption



Economic Growth

Greater economic mobility



Education Success

Students have higher graduation rates



Violence Reduction

Fewer instance of violence



Community Wellness

Overall positive effects on community well-being.

Health Benefits of Social Ties



Lower Mortality Rates

People with more social connections have significantly lower mortality rates.



Reduced Death Odds

Belonging to just one group cuts your odds of dying in the next year in half.



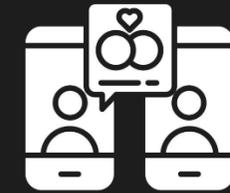
Predictor of Survivability

Strength and density of social networks can predict survivability more than genetics.



Happiness Increase

Belonging to one community group halves the likelihood of unhappiness.



Greater Engagement

More group memberships lead to better health, happiness, and civic engagement.

Social Capital in Cybersecurity

01

Team Resilience

In cybersecurity, social capital is crucial for team resilience and success.

02

Building Trust

Teams with high social capital share trust, ask for help, and support each other, preventing burnout.

03

Risks of Isolation

Without social capital, isolation increases, programs suffer, and burnout prevails.

Tribes & Belonging

My Journey to Community



Career Start

In the mid-2000s, I began my career in cybersecurity as a SOC analyst.



First Steps

I took my first steps when I was asked to organize a Snort User Group.



ISSA Involvement

Soon after, I was invited to join the board of the ISSA Chicago Chapter.



Hacker Con

I went to my first hacker con, and was blown away by the experience.



ChiSec Launch

And then came ChiSec, marking another significant milestone in my journey.

The Social Meetup Groups of ChiSec and BurbSec



CitySec Concept

Introduced informal cybersecurity meetup groups to Chicago's community.



Informal Setting

Provided a space for sharing stories and learning without formality.



Strong Community

Fostered a vibrant community in Chicago's cybersecurity scene.



BurbSec Success

Maintained community impact with a successful formula for suburban professionals.

The Formula for Thriving Cyber Social Community



Consistent Day

Choose a consistent day, like the first Thursday of the month.



Separate Checks

A venue with separate checks ensures fairness and convenience.



Co-host Collaboration

Ensure at least two or three co-hosts from different companies.



Welcoming Environment

Co-hosts should welcome new attendees, ensuring everyone feels included.



Key Principles

Consistency, accessibility, and hospitality are key to a thriving third place.



Community Engagement

Engaging activities foster a sense of belonging and connection.



The Best Social Tool Ever? Hightops and Barstools

BurbSec Growth



Locations

8



Attendance

70-100



Sponsors

Regularly



Chicago

6



Las Vegas

1



Galway

1

The Impact of Consistent Community Engagement



Cybersecurity Magnet

Meetup attracts individuals aiming to enter the cybersecurity field.



Job Connections

Regular attendees often find jobs through connections made here.



Self-Sustaining Community

Third places foster opportunities by bringing people together regularly.



Reliable Meetup

Chicago meetup thrives and welcomes newcomers without co-hosts.

This place is great. I'm normally such an introvert, but when I'm here, I forget my shyness. I just feel comfortable—and like I belong.'

Personal Growth Through Community

Career Milestones

Communities shape who you are by showing up and helping out.

Community Impact

I've continued to grow, becoming a co-founder of Hak4Kidz and more.

Personal Connections

These communities provide purpose, joy, and connections with like-minded individuals.



Leadership's Role in Fostering Connection



Foster Connection

Leaders can create conditions that foster connection, not isolation.



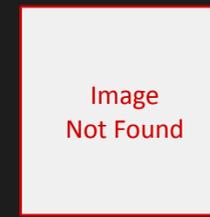
Recognize Signals

Recognize signals of disconnection: disengagement, lack of participation, and feeling unseen.



Address Struggles

Address these as potential signs of struggle, not just performance issues.



Regular Check-ins

Conducting regular check-ins can help identify and address issues before they escalate.



Open Forums

Creating open forums for discussion can help identify and address these issues effectively.

Creating a Culture of Connection



Supporting External Engagement



Encourage Participation

Encourage participation in external events like local meetups.



Attendance Support

Allow attendance during work hours as part of mental health support.



Networking Importance

Recognize the importance of external connections for growth opportunities.



Diverse Communities

Engaging with diverse communities inspires innovative ideas and solutions.

Recognizing and Empowering Connectors



Identify Connectors

Identify and support team members who naturally connect others.



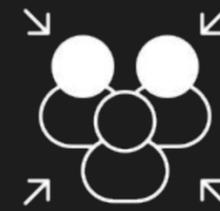
Crucial Role

These individuals may not be the loudest or most visible but are crucial for team cohesion.



Empower Community

Empower them to build and sustain community within the organization.



Organize Gatherings

For example, they might organize informal gatherings or facilitate introductions.



Enhance Collaboration

This enhances collaboration and morale within the team.

If we want resilient cybersecurity *programs*— we need resilient *people*



Community Engagement

Provide time and permission for team members to engage in community-building.



Empowerment Initiatives

Empower team members to create necessary communities if they don't exist.



Collaborative Projects

Encourage collaboration on projects that foster belonging and purpose.



Mentorship Opportunities

Facilitate mentorship to enhance community-building and knowledge sharing.

Organizational Benefits

01

Culture of Collaboration

Encouraging employees to join or build communities enhances leadership by fostering a culture of collaboration and innovation.

02

Employee Benefits

Employers benefit from increased employee satisfaction, loyalty, and reduced turnover.

03

Dynamic Workforce

Community engagement leads to a more dynamic and adaptable workforce, driving organizational success.

Building a Supportive Organizational Culture

01

Trust and Collaboration

A supportive culture encourages open communication, trust, and collaboration among employees.

02

Engagement Promotion

Leaders can promote engagement by recognizing and rewarding contributions to community-building efforts.

03

Attracting Talent

A strong organizational culture can attract and retain top talent, driving long-term success.

So What's Next?

Taking the First Step

Take Time to Listen

If you have the power to listen, you have the power to heal

Help 1 Person A Day

Helping others will decrease your loneliness, and increases our own sense of value and connection

Spend 15 Minutes a Day

Reaching out to someone you care about can make all the difference

Prioritize In-Person Interaction

On-line interaction doesn't provide the same level of connection

Building Communities



Start With What You Know

Cyber can be one of the easiest places to join or build a community.



Lower Barriers

Helps lower the barrier to entry into cybersecurity.



Familiar Language

You already speak the language of cybersecurity.



Find Your Footing

Once you find your footing, everything else becomes easier.

Expanding Beyond Cybersecurity



Community Value

While cybersecurity communities hold significant value, it's equally crucial to reach out beyond those circles.



Professional Identity

Starting within areas that reflect our professional identity may seem straightforward.



Personal Passions

Seek out other groups that align with your personal passions, creativity, and happiness.



Diverse Groups

Whether it's a running team, a gaming community, a singing group, or a communal garden.



Create Third Space

Therefore, create your third space—but also develop your fourth and fifth.



Increase Happiness

You'll increase your happiness by expanding your social connections and interests.

The Spark of Community

Every thriving community starts with someone deciding to show up—and someone else deciding to welcome them. That's it. That's the spark. Whether you're a leader, an introvert, a connector, or someone still searching for their people—you have a role to play in building what comes next.

“In a very real sense, we are all aliens on a strange planet. We spend most of our lives reaching out and trying to communicate.

If during our whole lifetime, we could reach out and really communicate with just two people, we are indeed very fortunate.”

Gene Roddenberry

Let's be the ones who make that happen

Because in cybersecurity—and in life—we don't just need more defenses.

We need more connection. We need more belonging.

We need more places where everybody knows your name.

Thank You!

Helpful Links

- <https://www.linkedin.com/in/robertwagner2/>
- <https://www.chicagocisoofttheyear.com/>
- <https://burbsec.com/>
- <https://www.hak4kidz.com/>
- <https://bsides312.org/>

