



**Testimonials from people who attended the Community Building workshops
during October 2009**

"The workshop by Peter brought sharply into focus the work we have yet to do if we claim to be authentic leaders within our organizations and communities. The workshop has confirmed for me that the time to act is NOW! Being an OD practitioner much of what he says was innately known and practiced to some extent but there was an urgency that was generated by my attendance at the workshop. I am currently "in process" of working out how our organisation can make the shift more visible and action oriented so that we can begin to engage with Peter's approach."

Rama Naidu, DDP

"I believe that the "community building methodology" (and no doubt similar deep processes) offer us a way to re-narrative our lives experientially, such that racism, class"ism", gender-ism and other "isms" profoundly lose their power to control our lives and the choices we make, and the possibilities we can step in to. This is not to deny the importance and significance of our history, and the deep scars we have inherited as individuals and collectives as South Africans. As Peter Block would say, this history is both interesting and important, but it need not be powerful - that is our choice.

I was (in fact, I would vouch that all were) profoundly moved by our ability to create community, not only in spite of our divisions, but a community enriched by this very diversity of experience and perspective. The methodology and experience is profoundly liberating from the colonialism mentality that is so pervasive -- of the coloniser and the colonised, the empowered and the disempowered, the helper and the helped."

Rolfe Eberhard

"Peter Block's seminar exceeded my wildest expectations...I learned, I laughed, I listened, I shared, I made connections, I sang, I danced, I took a stand and I stood in awe."

"A threshold experience, with no threshing and holding and much passing through! Peter's percolating process awoke me, us at our edges, establishing a level of rawness, vulnerability, and intimacy that I've never experienced in a group – that our group comprised 150 dappled and motley Capetonians, renowned for divisiveness, is miraculous! Those spaces between, normally experienced as separating, almost instantly became connecting. Peter took us to that place that Hopkins described in 'The Circus Animals' Desertion', though with infinitely more lightness, leavened with wry and dry humour, and multiple ladders provided:

*And now that my ladder's gone
I go where all ladders start,
In the foul rag and boneshop
Of the heart.*

Can't wait for the next one. Count me and the team in!"

Jonathan Gevisser, The Extra Mural Education Project

"Thank you so much for bringing Peter through to SA, I felt he was a real gift to us and was so completely different to what I had expected. I think as a South African having worked in various forms of development for a little while, I am sometimes quite weary of 'well-meaning' foreigners who have little or no appreciation of the context here and want to bring their own solutions and agenda regardless. Peter was completely different as he was curious, humble and came to learn from us as much as we could learn from him. How refreshing!

Through the conversations that were started, I saw respect, trust and love literally grow in the room. It gave me hope for how this could happen on our streets, in our businesses, schools and communities across South Africa."

Annie McWalter, Heartlines

"The most thought provoking questions I have had to answer was: What gift are you holding in exile? What is it that makes you sad/sorrowful? and What invitation are you waiting to receive or extend that is holding you hostage? To answer these questions has been a truly liberating experience!

I can now echo the words of Norman Vincent Peale "Have great hopes and dare to go all out for them. Have great dreams and dare to live them. Have tremendous expectations and believe in them."

Thanks for making this wonderful experience possible!"

Alison Alexander, Rainbow House

"It was a powerful experience because it reminded us that being human is about truly connecting with others."

Hazel Dunbar, Psychology at Work

"The 2 days I recently spent at the Peter Block seminar were two of the most stimulating and exciting days I have ever experienced !

Well done and keep up your powerful work in helping SA become the great nation it can be"

Roy Silver, Business for Good

"This was a truly transformational event! What struck me most about Peter, was his ability to be present to himself and his listeners moment by moment. His authenticity and truthfulness was both endearing and challenging. Not once did he fall into the trap of trying to please or impress. He simply shared his method powerfully and with conviction allowing the impact of it speak for itself. A speaker who truly practices what he preaches is rare.

As for the content itself...it has inspired me to rethink my own contribution to the community and I made a promise to myself and everyone who comes in contact with my work that I will never do anything that is not inclusive of people from across a range of groupings so that people who do not usually get together can build relationship."

Petro Janse van Vuuren, PlayingMantis

"It was the most amazing privilege to attend Peter Block's workshop this week. I don't come from an organisational development background, so when I arrived I felt quite shy ... I think there was only one person in the room whom I knew (vaguely). Well, two days later, I can honestly say that I feel that I belong to a community of incredible friends.

The workshop was the most wonderfully healing experience for me. For the last three years of full-time PhD studies, I've felt increasingly isolated as more intense studying and diminishing savings have seemed to narrow my world. But I now realise that I am one small circle, one little question, away from community! I've met inspiring people, made new friends and felt deeply appreciated. I can't tell you what that has meant to me.

You have done a wonderful thing for this dear country and for many, many individuals."

Alice Ashwell

"In just one week its been pretty amazing how often I've referred back to the overall messages from the workshop, have used specific examples from the workshop, or

recounted personal insights from the workshop. My understanding of the workshop and the potential it unleashes is growing by the day, and long after the sessions have ended.

What else can I say, except a big personal thank you to you and your team for your unremitting energy, ambition and caring."

Jo Eayres

"What I will take with me from the two days was that "I learnt that community building is not so much a physical thing, it's about connecting through our experiences, our hopes, and our dreams. When we talk together...we walk together."

Peter was amazing, and was well supported by the excellent Bruce and Barbara. I am delighted that he will be returning next year, and agree that we must make a plan to facilitate it."

Lynn Moss, Dramatic Solutions

"Your words and your presence have touched me deeply. Thank you! I feel gratitude for all the circles of love you have created and are creating!

At this evenings Hout Bay Partnership meeting I created a circle of chairs and we began with the 2 questions we asked each other at the start on Monday.

YES! We are creating a different community and look forward to creating more with you...and Peter next year

"The two days was a simply connecting experience which has had a profound impact on how I am with myself and others. I can now sit back more easily, ask more questions with curiosity instead of tightly focussing on finding a solution to a problem"

Bronwen Lankers-Byrne

"I wanted to thank you again for a really wonderful 2 days with Peter Block. I was deeply touched by Peter, by the sense of community that built among strangers in such a short time and by you and your commitment to make South Africa the country of our dreams. I am in awe of the contribution you are making."

Ian MacDonald, South Africa: The Good News

"Many thanks to you and your team for organising a very wonderful experience for all of us. To have engaged at such a deep level in such a short time with such diverse people and to have shared the deep passion that we all have for our country, expressed through gesture, conversation, dance, poetry and music was heart warming and profound."

"Thank you for hosting the great workshop with Peter Block this week. Have received your follow-up email and am especially glad you included the enormously stirring poem about Africa and being an African. Please convey my heartfelt thanks to the author for sharing such a striking message!

I have attended a number of development workshops over recent years, but really enjoyed Peter's dry style as well as the infectious energy that Bruce and Barbara added to the mix. "

Lee Marinaki

"The workshop filled me with such humility for the wonderful people in our country and renewed my hope for what we can create together. It was a fascinating journey in which I was able to connect with fellow South Africans, and with my deepest soul."

Leigh Turner, Dialogue Circle: Programme Manager, Gordon Institute of Business Science

"My two decades of community-building work have often been frustrated in the execution of programs and projects. Peter's insistence on developing communication first, and on the small group as the unit of communication, is common sense made available even to such numb-skulls as me!"

Jeremy Burnham

"By choice I am proudly South African and on the Potter's Wheel to shape part of what our possibility and HOPE is for our community In leadership and business. Clay needs to be pliable and stay moldable to be formed together. I am changed and you helped shape me – thank you!

For Her People need to hear and own she is the answer and holds the possibility of belonging and community - we matter – are significant -we have value – worthy to be heard – give of self – are highly skillful – family values are most important, faith is our anchor and unashamedly ethical business principles our strong foundation.

Pain is only a part of a component and also holds its blessings and gifts as we allow it be a teacher –

So is birthed possibility our aim and focus.

The evidence of this gift and choice a space we wish to honour – a unique dance, a tight mix and maturing friction

Pearl in making, beautifully formed, soft membrane, rough handling, needing friction and beating from the storm and sea - yet holding internally in its' secret place - the holy space - the seat of Life and HOPE – wisdom – the greatest gift of all.

It matters not where it came from or what its intensity or its history

What matters is the energy released that takes its creativity forward – that it is TRANSFORMED

It's willingness to take ownership and be the answer and make a difference to the here and now

With the Community Builders Workshop I was taken to heights and depths and widths and breaths and hearts and reasons for being in self and connected in community with others in community - that ignites in me a flame for LIFE and a deep sense of ownership for where I am at and what possibility I bring of unlocking HOPE and potential in being significant in those leader I work with in the Marketplace.

What struck me was that as we shared the pain and triumphs and possibilities – it mattered not what the history was ANC/ Umkontwe /UDF/ Disinherited or fatherless/ or retrenched and marginalized/ disappointed by people in power that failed on their promises after the struggle/ there was empathy and we could hold the pain – we did not walk in each other's shoes – we could hear each other – could not even start to think how it was for the other – but could revere and hold and listen and respect – and acknowledge – and Peter facilitated this with the sensitively yet respectfully not walk past this – and even with his shadow showing – making us all just fellow seekers of possibility owners – nothing less than holy moments were experienced and God could be sensed present – in un-conditionalness - no matter what the beliefs, background or orientation and complete strangers. I call this authentic community and thank God for the community I could experience with you all.

Thank you Peter and Louise and the team and fellow community Builders!"

Martie Lancellas, Strong Foundation

"First of all, a warm thank you for bringing this Gift to South Africa. Please also pass on my sincere appreciation to Kerrie and all the admin staff for the very competent and efficient way in which they handled the registration process and the workshop logistics.

By being in Peter's humble presence, I experienced fresh insights into the essence of Leadership and debunked some of the ingrained and outdated traditional models of Leadership; as well as a new take on Productivity Improvement and Performance Management processes in a business context. The most powerful insight I took away with me was the experience of what kind of interactive processes create a sense of being connected, generate energy and build trust.

Peter is a fountain of innovative insights and wisdom on human relationships, with a down-to-earth approach and an engaging sense of humour. I have already had the opportunity of applying some of the many insights gained during the workshop, in my coaching practice as well as in personal relationships; and they have made a difference in establishing rapport, generating energy and building trust. "

Mario Compagnoni

"Louise thanks SO MUCH for the "Peter Block" - workshop!!! You are the Fairy Godmother of a MUCH-needed transformation process needed in our society and in the workplace, and Peter Block's presence was the realisation of the dream within you...."

Marie Coetzer

*"Thank you for inviting me to attend the Peter Block workshop this week, I thoroughly enjoyed it and like Ian from SA the good news, I felt so drained after the 2 days I have literally had a headache since the end of the 2nd day and its just gone away today fortunately (so obviously some serious *hit inside me to let go!!!!!!)*

Peter was amazing and I thank you for your abundance, I sincerely appreciate it and benefitted immensely from being there with everyone for the 2 days."

Kim Kirsten

"With unstinting generosity, Peter gave me credible and unwavering experience of what community is, as well as practical ways in which a sense of belonging can be co-created, "one room at a time." Over two days, it became the journey of a life time."

Evelyn Howard Organisational Change and Human Development

"Thank you for bringing Peter Block to South Africa!

I have just finished forwarding the South Africa - The Good News weekly email with the report of the Peter Block workshop to one of my closest friends from childhood, who is now living in Australia. She was here this week to attend her father's funeral and I met up with her on Tuesday evening after attending the Peter Block workshop. I shared my excitement with her about creating the "Walk Together" scenario. I was involved with the Action for a South Africa initiative last year and I think this similar initiative, if we make work of it also has the potential to get our country taking the "Walk Together" road. I have asked her to forward the SA The Good News email to as many South Africans living in Australia and friends of South Africa in Australia as she can. We can build communities one room at a time and also "one email group at a time!"

I also attended on behalf of our director, Eugene Daniels, who was in the Eastern Cape a broad management meeting of the Western Cape Education Department where the MEC for Education was also present. I related my very positive experience of the Peter Block workshop there and also shared the 3 Dinokeng Scenarios. So another room knows a little about this process..."

Berenice Daniels

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Building communities one room at a time

This week I learnt that building a community is difficult. And I learnt that it is so very easy.

I attended a workshop that was conducted by Peter Block, an American authority on the reconciliation of community.

Over two emotionally draining, yet invigorating days, I experienced how quickly a community can be formed. We were challenged to pour out our deepest fears, hopes, sadness and joy to people we had never met. It was so hard, yet we, as individuals and then as a collective, persisted. And as we did, it became easier and easier, deeper and deeper, until it was hard to believe that we don't communicate like this with everyone, all the time.

Peter Block believes that this is how social fabric is built, one room at a time, and that the small group is the unit of transformation. Large-scale transformation then occurs when enough small groups shift towards the larger change that we wish to experience in our societies.

He maintains that the existing community context, in countries like the United States and within certain communities in South Africa (my presumption), is one that markets fear, assigns fault and worships self-interest and that this context supports the belief that the future will be improved with new laws, more oversight and stronger leadership.

The new context, one that restores community, is one of possibility, generosity and gifts.

Block challenged us to ask questions, instead of offering answers. He encouraged us to declare a possibility that we could create, a future beyond reach, that has the power to transform our communities. He urged us to recognise our gifts and the gifts of others and to make use of these gifts in everything we do. He inspired us to open our hearts.

It is an incredibly hard process to describe, but it had immense power. In the space of two short days, a community formed out of a room of strangers from all walks of life. In hindsight it was so easy.

The workshop was organised by the remarkable Louise van Rhyn of Symphonia. Louise is a phenomenon, a dynamo with a passion for this country that is quite beautiful.

When I emailed her to say thank you for making the workshop a reality, she replied by saying: "When the Dinokeng Scenarios were published, I had such a strong sense of being called - to do what I can to make the Walk Together scenario a reality."

"This week was a further refinement of that calling; walking together will only be possible if we are able to reclaim our humanity and become connected as human beings. So my commitment is to develop the capacity for community building in South Africa so that we can ignite communal possibility.

"Imagine if we can be a country where we are able to move away from a focus on individual achievement and truly live our Ubuntu heritage!"

She continued: "(Earlier this year) I expressed an intention to recruit a million South Africans to commit to walking together. This last week has made me re-think this. I think the task is to create opportunities for a million people to experience a deep sense of connection with fellow South Africans. I have no doubt that this will automatically lead to walking together but the starting point is connection and community rather than focusing on the work that needs to be done."

Louise is striving to give a million South Africans the beautiful gift of connection and community. She is striving to make an immense positive difference in the land that she so loves.

She is doing it, one room at a time.

By Ian Macdonald